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LEMUEL

The Romance of Politics.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'CYNTHIA.'

O Vita, misero longa felici brevis!—PUBLIUS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LEMUEL.



CHAPTER I.

‘**S**O history is at its old tricks again,’ said Miniver Green, when the excitement consequent upon Nestor’s announcement had somewhat subsided. ‘The monotony of it wearies me at times; it is positively appalling.’

‘History!’ said James Mowbray, in some amazement; ‘why, what has history to do with this crisis?’

‘History is repeating itself,’ said Miniver, ‘that is all. This democratic wave, this spring-tide of disturbance, returns at intervals that are almost arithmetically regular. It is provoking to find that our political metamorphoses, in respect of which we are wont to take credit to ourselves as an outcome of our constitution, are little more than automatic after all, dependent on the swing of the great pendulum whose axis is in the skies. But little is due to our skill, our much-vaunted political foresight; we only follow whither we are led, though we assume to ourselves daily all the honours of the pioneer.’

‘For my part, I detest history,’ said Mowbray. ‘History is a place of sepulchre, and its voices are the hollow winds

that moan round dead men's graves. What profiteth to tell whether this or that dead man did or did not do such and such things? History is made up of withered leaves and debris hustled by every wind, tossed hither and thither until gathered at last into mouldy and forgotten heaps.'

'History is more than this,' Lemuel maintained; 'history is a reminiscence indeed, but it is also a prophecy. At the cross-roads of time history stands and waves its giant arms to point the way to the traveller's bourne. To the adventurous history ever wafts a kindly hail: to the timid and the unworthy a warning and a menace.'

'Then let us learn to fix our eyes upon history, and show that we can profit by its teaching,' said Miniver; 'but this Go-

vernment is, I fear, too feeble and too listless for the task. It is the opportunity and the occasion for a bold and daring spirit to come to the front and assume the command if need be ; nothing but audacity can preserve the Ministry now. The hour has struck : where is the man ?'

Miniver's question remained unanswered, however, and the march of events soon showed that it was unanswerable. The storm that had burst forth in the House of Commons spread with rapidity over the country, or was, perhaps, more truly, the faithful reflex of the feeling that was abroad already. The Government was defeated after a three days' debate, and this was followed by an appeal to the constituencies. But the democracy had been offended by the supineness of the Govern-

ment in their cause, and railed at its indifference, for Beauport's fitful energy, which had for a time excited hopes of better things, had subsided already. The Ministerial candidates were hooted in the great towns, and even in the counties the partisans of the proletariat were rubbing their hands.

Agents had been despatched from London ; men glib with the tongue, to arouse the great centres of population and to lash them to fury against an effete Administration. It was the hour for the popular orator to come forth into the open air to exhibit his powers and earn a reward. It was his opportunity, and he understood it, and soon he was well to the front.

Acute and audacious ; subtle and open as the day ; a man of uproarious humour

and reckless vituperation ; with a voice that challenged Niagara, and a laugh whose resistless refrain carried away opposition with the force of a whirlwind, there was no mistaking the man or his calling. And of his class at this time not one was better known, or enjoyed a higher reputation for unscrupulous dexterity than Jeremy Ricketts—Jingling Ricketts, he was styled from the odd medley of rattling sounds that was characteristic of his oratory. Ricketts was a short man but excessively stout, and when engaged on the platform, his activity from his waist upwards was something prodigious. To assail a pocket-borough was his special delight ; he had roused the inhabitants of more than one such to a sense of their degradation and of their duty by his stir-

ring appeals, and now he had been selected at headquarters to proceed to Bedborough and there blow a blast that would shake the house of Beauport to its foundations.

The dull little inland town had not hitherto troubled itself to examine political problems. There was the great man in the great house hard by, who, as the burgesses said, had nothing else to do. Let him look to it. For themselves it sufficed to drink the great man's ale and be thankful.

Jingling Ricketts had come to set this right ; he descended like a thunder-bolt into this paradise of old-world Toryism. Men were dazed at first by his effulgence, —they failed to comprehend him, and his reception by the inhabitants, unpromising

from the beginning, became positively frigid when it was rumoured that he was a teetotaler. But Jingling Ricketts was not to be thus discredited ; he had a ready wit, and could be all things to all men as occasion arose. He was an adept at his trade ; and, once away from headquarters, where he passed for a total abstainer, could crack a bottle with the boldest.

Ricketts went to work with professional despatch, and wider and wider opened the mouths of the provincials as he rattled on with the stock phrases and the glib periods proper to his calling. He explained to them that they had been duped, plundered, defrauded of their birthright and everlasting inheritance ; that it was the rich who had robbed the poor. But the

provincials hardly followed his reasoning, for to them it appeared that most of the petty larcenies perpetrated thereabouts at any rate had been committed against their wealthy neighbour and not by him. Amazement sat upon every face, and wider still opened their mouths.

‘Besotten idiots!’ thought Jingling Ricketts when he perceived that some of his most telling phrases had fallen flat;—‘incorrigible fools! But they shall not defeat me.’ And thereon the rattle rose to a pitch of frenzy.

‘Property is plunder!’ cried Ricketts in his shrillest tones. ‘Why should you not have your share of it, O my friends?’

‘Hooray!’ here bellowed a hawker in the crowd, on whose brain the first ray

of enlightenment had begun to dawn. He had traversed the adjoining counties in pursuit of his vocation, and was held a man of travel that had seen the world. 'Hooray!'

It was a solitary cheer at the first, but the rocket had gone up into the blue heaven to proclaim that the attack had begun; nay, rather, it was the signal that victory had declared itself already all along the line. Bedborough was in revolt from that hour. The reaction in the pent-up brains of the audience, once the example had been set, was intense and overwhelming; and Jingling Ricketts, mounted on the shoulders of the people, was thenceforth their champion and deliverer.

Lord Beauport had not been accustomed to visit his constituents before the

nomination day, when it had been the rule for generations to elect, without hesitation, the nominee of the Lords of Weobly. It was a formality and nothing more, even when the candidate was a stranger; but that the election of a member of the family should be questioned was a contingency such as had not occurred to the imagination of the boldest. For the inhabitants of Bedborough the interest of the proceedings began, and ended in an unlimited distribution of cheese and ale, and on the present occasion Lord Beauport had seen no reason to apprehend any departure from the immemorial practice. The echoes only of Ricketts' oratory had reached him at Newmarket, and they were quickly drowned in the rough clamour that

greeted the appearance of his popular colours on the course.

But a change has come over the faces of the people; they are packed closely together in the market-place to-day, and a hoarse murmur pervades the assembly. Beauport appears at the customary window, and is welcomed no longer with uproarious joviality. An unwonted silence, on the contrary, hangs over the crowd, save in the case of a noisy band in the centre, by whom he is met with loud demonstrations of hostility. The contagion spreads; each man standing shoulder to shoulder with his neighbour adds to his courage, and soon the air is rent with discordant cries. Beauport essays to speak; he and his friends about him signal for silence; when above the

clamouring multitude is heard the penetrating rattle of Jingling Ricketts.

‘Down with him! away with him! long live the people!’

The struggle is at its height; the excitement of the crowd in the enjoyment of their newly-asserted privilege is even frantic, when a window at the side of the square, immediately opposed to that at which Beauport stands, is thrown open, and at a signal from Jingling Ricketts the multitude is still.

As the ring of a silver bell, clear, musical, far-reaching, comes a voice that is audible to the very fringes of the crowd, and the speaker presents himself as the people’s candidate for the representation of Bedborough.

‘The people’s friend!’ cries Jingling

Ricketts, amidst a tempest of applause.
‘Hear him! Hear him!’

Lord Beauport steps backward and shades his eyes.

‘Impossible!’ he exclaims. ‘But that voice?—I cannot be mistaken!’

‘Leverson and liberty!’ cries Jingling Ricketts, flinging his cap into the air. And no sooner is the phrase uttered than it is taken up by the crowd, and becomes the watchword and the cry that is to carry everything before it.

And high above the din now come the ringing periods that wake to life the sluggish imaginations of the rustics, proclaiming to all men the everlasting evangel that God’s earth is for the people. Lemuel had thrown himself into the popular cause, for he knew that

it has ever been the cause that wins, and ever shall be ; but he uttered no word that could wound Beauport. Lemuel had not come forward until Beauport's defeat was already assured ; it was Lemuel's opportunity, and it was not for him to let it pass ; he had found the tide at the flood, and now floated in on the crest of the wave.

But the election is lost, and the election is won. Hardly knowing whether to credit what he had seen and heard, Beauport retired hastily. It was like a dream to him ; he almost hoped that he might yet awake to find that it was but some fantasy of the night. That he should have been rejected by the electors of Bedborough was sufficiently hard to believe, but that Lemuel should have

come forward and supplanted him was as nearly as possible incredible.

‘It was a traitor that we nourished in our bosom!’ exclaimed Beauport bitterly, when he encountered his wife after his defeat; ‘we have been deceived and betrayed.’

‘A snake in the grass!’ Daphne rejoined; ‘a veritable viper! I should have known him better; I should have recollected my first impressions. He deceived me the first day that I met him. It is my fault; it is all my fault—I am a miserable woman!’

Daphne covered her face with her hands as she spoke and burst into tears.

It was not so much Lemuel’s defection after all that weighed with her as her

husband's rejection; and in her anger she attributed it to Lemuel's machinations. But it mattered little that for the moment Daphne mistook the effect for the cause; the broad fact remained despite the flaws of logic.

Meanwhile the judgment of the electors had begun to make itself manifest throughout the kingdom, and the verdict pronounced at Bedborough was abundantly confirmed. Bedborough had indeed been one of the first of the constituencies to declare itself, and this in accordance with the tactics of the party in power, whereby it was hoped that a favourable example would be set to the rest. The result was received with dismay. A Cabinet Minister had been defeated in the safest constituency in the kingdom, and small

as was the place, insignificant in number as were the electors, a blow had been delivered, the effects of which were stunning. The eyes of the nation had rested on the pigmy contest in the benighted little town; the circumstances were picturesque and unique, and the result was received with an ovation wherever the opponents of the Ministry were gathered together. The partisans of the Government were struck with consternation, whilst the Opposition was vociferous in its rejoicing. As for Lemuel, his name was in every man's mouth for blame or for praise; but for one door that was closed in his face he found a score wide open to welcome him on his return to London. He was famous, and the undistinguished crowd, be they noble or

only wealthy, are ever famishing to share even for a night the halo that hovers round a famous man's head. It imparts by contact some portion of itself, they imagine ; something remains behind where such and such a one has dined or supped ; it is the ethereal, the imperishable part of man, and there is a mystery about it that follows and fascinates. Money cannot purchase it, for genius is intangible — incommunicable ; but money may prepare pleasant places, congenial retreats into which genius may be enticed and led. Genius lights up the place with its presence, and fills it for the time at least with its own incandescent glory, until the very atmosphere is made strange and intoxicating to the unfamiliar. Glorious appanage of the gifted

and the strong ! See the Crispeyn Carameles how they creep and cower in its presence ; see how they cringe and smirk. But they shake in their shoes the while. You are not of them, and they do not like you. They have to lift their eyes when they would look upon you, and, behold, they are dazzled. Gladly would they see you at perdition.

And, alas ! how often has genius, ill-directed, afforded them the thrice-welcomed spectacle ? The giant spirit ground to powder beneath the pettinesses of every-day life, that by their very number have overwhelmed it, led over the precipice by the reckless sense of power at last. But the Crispeyns dance the hornpipe the while, sing the Io Pœan, and glory in the security of

their dull-as-ditch-water wisdom. They are the wise of the world it may be; they are its staid ones; but it is not by such, nevertheless, that the world advances in wisdom.

And now the returns come in by sheaves; but the tares had been sown so thickly that, to the eyes of the Tories, the good corn scarce appears. The towns had revolted almost wholly; the best hope of the Administration lay in the counties, and they were the last to speak out. But here, too, there was grievous loss; for even the farmers were seen to toss their hats in the air to the cry of 'Long live the people.'

It was plain to all men that the Administration had fallen, and the atmosphere was charged already with rumour and speculation. If Daphne was de-

pressed, Marcia Mowbray's spirits rose, on the contrary, ever higher and higher as one defeat following on another left no doubt as to the fate of the Cabinet. Marcia dared not openly applaud Lemuel's action indeed, for even those who rejoiced admitted that there was something for which to apologise; but in her heart she was jubilant.

'I offer no opinion,' Marcia replied, when Daphne railed against Lemuel's proceedings with furious anger. 'After all, a worse man might have been chosen. Leverson has undoubted ability, and he is a gentleman.'

'A gentleman!' retorted Daphne, with a scornful laugh. 'An adventurer, rather, and a most dangerous one.'

'Dangerous, I admit,' Marcia replied,

with a tinge of malice; 'but I maintain, nevertheless, that Leverson is a gentleman. Indeed I scarce know whether to blame him at all. The fact is, the constituencies, even the most remote, have learnt to discriminate.'

'Gracious heaven! that we should have fallen on such days!' exclaimed Daphne.

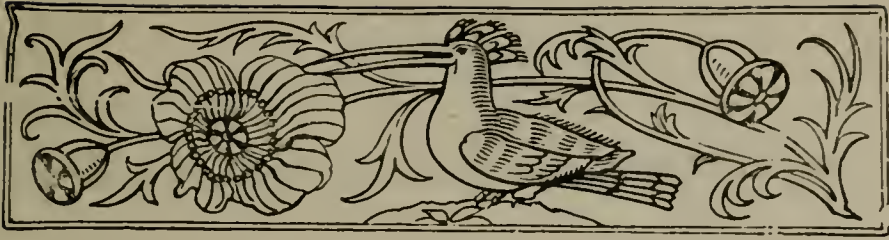
'It has placed us face to face with a new danger,' Marcia continued. 'Goodness knows where it will end!'

'They have made a bad beginning at Bedborough, however,' said Daphne defiantly, 'and I trust they may find reason to repent their conduct ere long. But, then,' she added, with a sigh, 'Beauport is so indolent that I doubt at times whether he will even take the trouble to punish them.'

'Her ladyship is not a little angry,'

said Marcia significantly, when she encountered Lemuel. 'I suppose this does not take you unawares, however—does not surprise you?'

'Surprise me! Not in the least,' Lemuel replied. 'It is inevitable. But I am really not in fault. It was not I who defeated Beauport: that result had been accomplished already. It was only a question at the last moment whether Ricketts or I should take his place, and I did not see any sufficient reason, I confess, for giving Ricketts the preference. But it was time that I made my appearance in Parliament,' added Lemuel quietly; 'most men would think so under the circumstances. To tell you the truth, I have been in the Cabinet these two years and nobody has known it.'



CHAPTER II.

‘**T**HE politics of women are their private property,’ Miniver Green observed, as he sat with Sanctimonious Stanhope after dinner ; ‘it is their happy privilege, and to them only appertains the unspeakable luxury of irresponsible rhetoric. We, on the other hand, are but trustees of the public and answerable for our views : it is the weight beneath which our shoulders yield, while the joyous women prattle on to the end. See the triumphant ones whose husbands are already within sight of office. There

are no limits to their exultation, no bounds to their babble; nay, they seem to lose their heads altogether not infrequently, to

“Flounce and tumble in unwieldy joy”

until their gyrations are positively grotesque. To the unconcerned they are a source of amusement, and to the philosopher of instruction.’

‘It may be so,’ said Stanhope; ‘but, alas!’ he added with a sigh, ‘I am neither unconcerned nor a philosopher—I am a married man. For me there are no longer illusions; the imagination has nothing left to work upon, no discoveries in reserve. I have been behind the scenes.’

‘Spare, my dear sir, spare our illusions,’ Miniver cried in affected alarm, ‘nor seek to convert their sylph-like forms into

ghouls by turning on the lurid lights of experience. We who have lived until now with our illusions are unwilling to give them up ; we are familiar with them ; they are the companions of our solitude ; they are the opium of old age. Even if we do but dream, suffer us to dream on to the end, for there is not a celibate amongst us so inveterate as not to cherish in his heart of hearts the thought that he may some day realise the delights of matrimony.'

Here Sanctimonious Stanhope groaned aloud.

'Yes, my dear sir, when the banquet is drawing to a close,' Miniver continued, 'and the appetite has lost its keen edge, men call for spice and condiment ; taken at the commencement they would impede,

not promote enjoyment ; but they make a famous finish. To have still before us the delightful stage of existence, the married state, is virtually to lengthen life,—to keep death at arm's distance, I may say. We are not without hope, for our course is not yet run nor our experience exhausted, and death, come when it may, is still premature.'

'Then you do not fear to procrastinate,' Stanhope remarked, regarding Miniver's grey hairs as he spoke ; 'to run the risk of forfeiting altogether this experience of bliss, as you would term it, by counting on the morrow—

"That fatal mistress of the young, the lazy,
The coward and the fool, condemned to lose
An useless life in waiting for to-morrow ;
To gaze with longing eyes upon to-morrow,
Till interposing death destroys the prospect?"'

Irene—JOHNSON.

‘ I understand your meaning only too well, however,’ added Stanhope dejectedly, ‘ and your reasoning is just ; but it would lead further than you have stated. To the married man death is rarely premature. He has drunk his cup to the dregs, and for him it only remains to die.—Gracious heaven ! what a fool I have been !’

Miniver Green was somewhat startled by this sudden access of energy, for Stanhope struck the table as he rose to his feet, and the glasses rang again.

‘ Have some more claret ere we join the women ?’ demanded Miniver.

But Stanhope shook his head, as he proceeded in the direction which Miniver had indicated.

Stanhope returned with his wife to Grosvenor Square, and no word passed

between them. As for Egidia, she had made the discovery that there was something better even than riches for which to seek in this world. Lemuel she might have loved, but she had despised him for his poverty, cast him out when in her heart she yearned for him, and she had preferred Sanctimonious Stanhope and his treasures. Now she knew what they could bring, and in the meantime Lemuel had leaped at a bound from obscurity to fame. Had she made a mistake after all? Egidia wondered. Had she missed her destiny, made shipwreck of her happiness? Had her diagnosis of the situation been utterly at fault? She regarded Lemuel with wistful eyes, and her heart misgave her. Youth and fame were there, and they were dazzling to look

upon. Youth and fame! splendid combination, and only short of immortality!

Lemuel had passed her by already in the path of life, Egidia felt; he had not cast even a glance at her in the hour of his triumph, and it was for him to condescend now, if he would. But in the estimation of Egidia's husband, Lemuel's conduct, even apart from his political opinions, was not to be condoned; and Sanctimonious Stanhope closed his doors in Lemuel's face until Egidia flung them widely open and invited him to enter. To Lemuel it was a small matter indeed that his presence was not acceptable to Sanctimonious Stanhope. Lemuel knew that with Egidia on his side he might do as he pleased, and it was thus that, smiling

blandly, he passed into the golden house in Grosvenor Square.

In Egidia's estimation her sacrifice had been sufficient already; to her husband she had paid the uttermost farthing, and she was determined to yield no further. If she had made a mistake she would, at least, do the best she could under the circumstances to repair it and to make life tolerable. But it was difficult of accomplishment. This worldly woman, this *élève* of the coteries of fashion, this prize-winner of the ballroom, writhed in her golden fetters that were as galling as any that are made of baser metal; she had forged them and was conscious of her error, nay, admitted it in every act as far as woman may. With every effort Egidia had been unable to conceal from Lemuel's

eyes that she understood the change that had come over their lives in these latter days. Her old manner of lofty superiority had deserted her, despite her desire to maintain it ; now it had fallen away for ever in the presence of successful and brilliant adventure. And by none more than by Lemuel was the involuntary homage appreciated ; the world that had sought to subdue and to banish him from its presence was commencing to cringe ; had he ever hesitated in his faith in his powers, his doubts would have vanished now that the world was coming round to his belief. In his heart Lemuel scorned the time-servers with a great scorn, but no line of his face was suffered to betray him.

It was no longer wealth that Egidia

coveted; she pined for distinction, the glittering crown of genius. And for those who are raised above the crowd by wealth alone there comes a time of languor, a feeling of gratified sensuality, that calls for a change. Men look abroad and long for that which is not purchaseable, and it is tantalising when your coffers are full to overflowing not to be able to buy. Yet such is the position of the wealthy in the presence of the highly-gifted mind. Egidia sighed for a change; her life had become a weariness to her already, though she still pursued with feverish delight the frivolous amusements of society. She sought to forget the sacrifice she had made for the attainment of riches, and in the first days of her married life it

seemed as if even this might have been accomplished. But the illusion passed away, and nought was left behind save bitter regrets. It was too late now ; the decision was irrevocable ; the law of the land had taken cognisance of the vow, and would not suffer its hold to be relaxed. Egidia looked out upon her future life, and saw no relief ; she looked within, and the whirlwind of turbulence that reigned there revolted fiercely against her apparent fate, even as the wild Atlantic rages in everlasting conflict with a rock-bound shore.

The struggle was momentous, for Egidia was determined to be free, even though by the law of earth and heaven alike she was bound until all-dissolving death terminated the contract. How her

liberation was to be accomplished, Egidia knew not, had not contemplated; accident, it might be, would come to her aid, and for the hour it sufficed to leave it so.

To Lemuel the unavailing regrets of this over-wise one of the world afforded an amusing study, and seldom was an invitation more acceptable than that which solicited his presence in Grosvenor Square.

With rare acuteness he had recognised his own destiny; he did not run counter to it or fight against it, even unconsciously, like so many. He studied its ways and its methods; he learnt to anticipate the inevitable and to bow to it, and thus saved the time and the labour that other men lose in unavailing conflict. He

turned away by a natural instinct from the impracticable ; and, while other men were beating the air, Lemuel had already passed on to the front, and was well-nigh out of sight.

And now the new Parliament had met, and the Ministry, having been outvoted on the address, placed their resignation forthwith in the hands of the Sovereign. The town was full of rumours, and the excitement at the clubs was at fever height. The same seats in the Cabinet were given away to half-a-dozen prominent politicians in the space of as many hours, and each man had his favourite candidate. Some days elapsed before the list was complete, and the new Government had made its first enemies in the persons of its disappointed friends.

To a young man entering Parliament the advice is given not to run in advance of his reputation, or to obtrude his presence prematurely on the attention of the House. The occasions in which the newly-elected have succeeded in establishing a reputation *per saltum* are of the rarest; failure and ridicule are the normal recompense of such precocious attempts. But for the few born leaders of men on whom nature sets her seal, who possess within themselves the well-assured consciousness of power, there is neither law nor custom. They dash into the midst of the fray, and the tide of battle urns with their presence. Such are the heaven-born statesmen of whom the history of all nations affords us examples. They who possess—

‘That portion of divinity, that ray
Of purest heaven which lights the public soul
Of patriots and heroes—’

But the growth of a Parliamentary reputation is slow for the most part, and dependent on fortune. To some the opportunity comes unawares, and it is for them to recognise the day of their visitation; to others it arises through an accident, a happy phrase it may be that runs from mouth to mouth, seldom, indeed, original, more often dependent for its attractiveness upon that oblivion wherein, according to Solomon, lies the secret of all novelty. Gigas is quoted to this day with applause for his description of Irish outrage—‘The wild justice of revenge.’ Gigas had looked into Bacon’s essay and discovered the phrase; but

the House, less familiar with the works of the philosopher, gave Gigas the credit of it. See Minim exhorting his countrymen to 'rest and be thankful.' Minim had been turning over the forgotten pages of the 'Journey to the Western Isles,' but lo! the House is in an ecstasy. Again, Minim would be epigrammatic when defining epigram. 'It is the thought of many,' he exclaims, 'and the wit of one.' The House is beside itself with pleasure. But Minim has Pope's line in his pocket all the while, and is responsible only for the paraphrase. He trusted to men's ignorance, and his judgment was sound; and again Minim laughed in his sleeve.

Go back a century and you may quote what you will; a rich harvest of applause awaits you, and it is ten to one that you

will earn a reputation for a philosopher if not for a wit.

When Lemuel returned to town after the election, Nestor hastened to offer his congratulations. Nestor had been engaged in the game of politics all his life, and the old tactician was too keenly alive to the merits of the man who had won by his wits, not to greet Lemuel with a certain enthusiasm. Nestor had entered Parliament himself when a young man, and had advanced steadily by patient industry, until he had reached the Cabinet and the Peerage. He was not a man of genius, but he was pre-eminently safe, and men recognise the convenience of such an element even in a union of all the talents.

Nestor was prolific of advice ; to him

it was a pastime and a pleasure to impart instruction ; and to a man who has retired from the business of life it is always a gratification to direct aspiring youth—to show ‘how fields were won.’ He lives again for the hour amid the scenes of his early struggles, and the contests of his manhood, and what is perhaps better still, he forgets in his enthusiasm the languors of age.

‘The House of Commons you will find to be neither a young woman nor an old woman,’ Nestor observed ; ‘to be treated neither with flippancy nor neglect. It is a middle-aged coquette, jealous and capricious, but ready to receive a young man’s advances with effusion if he can persuade her that he means all he says. It is the foundation of a Parliamentary reputation

that the House should believe in you, be convinced that you are in earnest. The process may be tedious, but when it has been accomplished, you may commence the superstructure of eloquence, wit, and humour that is to lead the way to fame.'

'Doubtless your advice is sound,' Lemuel replied ; 'but victories are won by force as well as by waiting and wooing. I have fought the world hitherto with arms in my hands, and I have not been unsuccessful. In this course I will continue to the end.'

In the midst of a heated debate Lemuel sprang to his feet, and when his silver notes rang through the chamber, men were startled into silence of a sudden. It was but for a moment, however, for Lemuel indulged in a flight of rhetoric that set the

House in a roar. He was not disconcerted; he awaited their composure, and then giving utterance to a stinging sarcasm, his audacity was received with a shout. The House was aroused and excited, at once amused and offended. But the episode passed, and Lemuel applied himself to the question under discussion with a knowledge and a ready wit such as the House of Commons never fails to appreciate.

It was midnight, but the benches were encumbered no longer with their wonted drowsy burden; men were alive and awake; they slept no more, and soon cheer upon cheer proclaimed that the orator had made his mark, and achieved a success. A brilliant peroration brought Lemuel's speech to an end, and he

resumed his seat amid loud and general plaudits.

Lady Muriel Bellecourt had, according to her custom, been reading aloud to the duchess the news of the day, but when she came unexpectedly upon the account of Lemuel's triumph her voice trembled, her nerve deserted her, and she turned deadly pale. The duchess, who was listening, her eyes being closed, did not at first perceive the change that had come over her niece, but Muriel's voice failing her, the duchess started from her seat, and was only in time to catch the girl in her arms and to save her from falling to the ground.

‘My darling!’ cried the duchess in alarm. ‘Rest, rest; the heat has been too much for you. O Muriel, my

Muriel, how my heart bleeds to see your sad, pale face !'

But the duchess had guessed the truth ; she understood the cause only too well of Muriel's indisposition, though unwilling to acknowledge it. From the day when Muriel's eyes had met Lemuel's, she had seen no love in the eyes of any other. In vain had the noble and the well-born trooped to her feet ; in vain had the duchess set her heart upon this and upon that brilliant alliance. The greatest heiress in England, the bluest blood in the land flowed in the veins of Muriel Bellecourt ; but her heart was set with a boundless and irrevocable love upon the man whom the world of rank and fashion regarded as an adventurer. The duchess had,

indeed, continued to look upon Lemuel with favour, notwithstanding the events connected with the Bedborough election, which had shaken the faith of so many; but the pride of her order refused to contemplate him as an aspirant to Muriel's hand. Paler and paler grew the love-sick girl as the weary days passed by. The world seemed to smile upon her; and the scene around was fair and the prospect as joyous as the earthly paradise of our first mother; but Muriel also longed for a fruit that was forbidden, and forthwith the scene was changed before her eyes, and a strange apprehension came over her that turned existence to bitterness. At length the duchess became seriously alarmed for the health of her niece.

‘There is more the matter here than we know how to deal with,’ said the kindly physician, in reply to the duchess’s anxious inquiries. ‘We medical men are eminently prosaic, and do not enter readily upon the region of sentiment. In the whole range of our pharmacopeia there is not to be found a remedy sufficiently subtle, a drug sufficiently potent to salve the fine fibres of a woman’s heart. The physician is at fault, though he has done his best, and his hand has lost its cunning. He retires, but the case is not hopeless: the remedy rests with you.’





CHAPTER III.

THE still autumn days had come round again, and the brown and yellow leaves of the oak and the beech were falling in silent showers, and strewing the earth with their russet carpet. The sun had lost its warmth, its rays were life-giving no longer, but came and went like the smiles that linger and play round the faces of the dying that have no joy in them.

The Duchess of Shetland and her niece had, as usual at this season, proceeded to

Weobly, where Lord and Lady Beauport were keeping open house for their friends. But for Muriel there was none of the old freshness about the place ; on the contrary, to her it seemed as if nature itself sympathised with her grief, and in its decay presented a type of her own blighted hopes. The memories of the happy days passed there in Lemuel's society pervaded the place. The terrace along which they had sauntered in the moonlight ; the haunted valley and the recollection of their adventure together ; whithersoever she turned her steps there was something that recalled more vividly than before the image of him whom she adored. And that which made her sorrow deeper was the thought that after all she had no assurance that he cared for her more than

for the rest. Who could say that he cared for her at all? Had he returned even a tithe of the affection which she had lavished upon him, surely it must have made itself manifest? But the impenetrable shroud in which Lemuel wrapped himself habitually left all conjecture only conjecture still. Was he indeed as one that had been cut out from the flint stone, or was he something more than human, superior to the passions of men, contemptuous of their weaknesses? Muriel pondered over the mystery in which Lemuel's life was enveloped; to her he seemed at times not to belong to the world as she knew it, but rather to some higher sphere where human weaknesses have no existence; to dwell upon the earth indeed, and yet to

be not of it. For hours at a time Muriel would gaze upon the spot where they had stood together in the Valley of the White Lady; and she could almost fancy that the sound of his voice was still in her ears. Then waking from her reverie she would wonder to herself whether, when she was dead, her spirit might wander there, and meeting, perchance, happy lovers between whom and their heart's desire no evil chance had interposed, whether she too would hasten away into space wringing her hands in despair.

The still autumn passed on its way, and the frosts and the snows of the winter succeeded, and the valleys grew cheerless, and the hills were bleak, and the multitude of holiday-makers returned to the town as to a more genial clime.

And with them were the Duchess and Lady Muriel Bellecourt. It is the social summer of our land when men gather round the fireside, and the curtains are close-drawn, and the windows are barred against the bitter blast, and men laugh and make merry over their nuts and wine. And the women are collected together in coteries, and their tales are tenfold at this time. Their thoughts are less scattered, and their attention is no longer drawn away and diverted by the myriad phases of fashion; there is time for reflection, and they turn instinctively to the domestic affairs of their neighbours.

From the day that Lemuel had been declared to be the duly-elected member for Bedborough, Daphne had pursued him with unrelenting rancour. She was a true

woman that resented a wrong done to her husband a hundredfold more than if it had been committed against herself; and when she discovered the secret of Muriel's love, Daphne knew no rest, until she had, as she believed, thwarted it effectually. In Bonnie Beauclerc, Daphne found an instrument ready to her hand for this purpose. The girls had been friends from childhood, and Bonnie, who had laughed in Willie Lambton's face, scoffed at the mention of Muriel's disinterested affection. But Muriel was proof against a hundred such as she, and could bear with the taunts, and be patient under the spoken daggers which Bonnie Beauclerc aimed through her at the man whom Muriel loved. As long as she could see him, and listen to the music of his voice, and dream away the

intervals until he came again, life for her was not without hope. It was not until Daphne had prevailed so far with the duchess as to exclude Lemuel altogether from Muriel's sight that she broke down utterly with a cry of despair.

Whilst his enemies plotted against him, Lemuel's political reputation continued to rise higher and higher. It was but his third session, and his Parliamentary fame was no longer brilliant, meteoric—it had begun already to settle and solidify. It seemed that whatever Lemuel took in hand he had the art or the good fortune to conduct to a successful issue. The fact was, his study of mankind stood him in good stead now ; and, when a work of difficulty or of danger had to be accomplished, Lemuel had no hesitation in the

selection of a fitting agent. It is the ruling faculty and the keystone of statesmanship, but to the world at large he seemed to be possessed of the enchanted ring of the Eastern tale. When rubbed a spirit appeared :—

‘At thy service, at thy service, O my master! Demand thou and thou shalt receive. Dost thou desire to build a town, or to ruin a city, or to slay a king, or to dig a river, or anything of that kind? For, whatsoever thou demandest it will happen.’

The elder generation of politicians were scared. They had plodded to their places by the accustomed stages, but what was this phenomenon that shot up into mid-air and illuminated all the heavens by its lustre? The staid ones were aghast.

They could not believe that this sudden effulgence was anything more than that of the shooting star or the fiery comet, that only flames across our skies to be extinguished or to vanish into endless space. They were not to be disturbed in their old-world beliefs ; they, or their fathers before them, had not encountered one such as this man, and they were not prepared to believe in or to accept him. The country gentlemen stood aloof, and the townsmen looked askant : it needed all the might of conquering genius to lead them in its train captive and content. But the Ministry had formed a truer estimate of Lemuel's powers, they had felt his strength, and he was already in the fore front of every Parliamentary contest. Soon he was put forward, like another David, to worst the chosen

champions of the Opposition with his ready sling and stone.

In the midst of the absorbing controversies of political life, Lemuel had maintained his affectionate interest in Willie Lambton. The pale, sad youth had laboured assiduously, and laboured beyond his strength to attain the position wherein he still fondly hoped that he might claim Bonnie Beauclerc for his own. But it was the labour of Sisyphus, and even as he toiled his heart misgave him. He was not equal to the task ; success in life was, he felt, for the strong, not merely for the willing, and his hands fell listlessly by his side at last.

For weeks together Willie had not been seen, and Bonnie Beauclerc had well-nigh forgotten that such a one existed ; even

Marcia Mowbray had not concerned herself about him, when a few hurried lines from Lemuel informed her that Willie lay on his death-bed in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Lemuel was by his side when Marcia arrived in haste; indeed, Lemuel had been absent but little during the night or the day since Willie's illness had assumed a serious aspect. And even now, and in the immediate presence of death, there was one thought that was above every other in Willie Lambton's mind. He desired to see her whom he had once hoped might have been his wife; to look upon her face; to tell her that he loved her to the end with a passionate love; to hear from her lips, if he might, that even at the last there was some return of affection. Such a

desire could hardly be refused at such a moment. Bonnie Beauclerc was startled at first when Lemuel broke to her the request of the dying man. For the first time in her life she was serious when Willie Lambton's name was mentioned in her presence, and she was serious now, because she was vexed.

This was a worry to her; there was no amusement to be had from it; it was like going to church, and that she found to be sufficiently irksome on the Sabbath without having to repeat the ceremony in the middle of the week. She would gladly have deferred the visit until, as she said, some convenient day; but time pressed now, and Lemuel was urgent, for it was a matter of days no longer but of hours.

Noiselessly Lemuel entered the sick-room followed by Bonnie Beauclerc, whose heart had been beating nervously as she ascended flight after flight of the dark old stair. The nurse who watched by the sick man's side withdrew at a sign from Lemuel, and for the space of a minute there was no sound with the exception of the troubled breathing of the sufferer. There was no light save that of a shaded lamp that stood near the bed, just revealing Willie Lambton's finely-chiselled features, worn and marked with suffering. In another moment he had awoke, and seeing a strange figure standing by Lemuel's side, seemed at first to be nervous and disconcerted. There was an anxious look in his eyes as they fixed themselves inquiringly upon Lemuel, and

it was apparent that he could scarcely be persuaded that such a happiness awaited him as that Bonnie Beauclerc should come to visit him. The most he had dared to hope for was a kind message to soothe and comfort his last moments. But his misgivings are at an end now, for Lemuel has revealed her presence, and for an instant the old look has come back, and there is a joy and a light in Willie Lambton's eyes such as used to play there when Bonnie laughed in his face, and he tried to think that she loved him.

‘Had this happened before,’ whispered Willie, ‘I almost think that I could have lived. I feel so happy; I am so thankful, so grateful.’

Lemuel placed Bonnie's hand in Willie

Lambton's, and a smile passed over his pale features, and he closed his eyes as if he would pass away ere the spell was broken. But a thought had occurred to him.

‘Stay, stay,’ he whispered, with such strength as remained to him; ‘I had almost forgotten. But it is not too late. There are some lines here. I had intended them for your birthday. Take them, dearest; they are yours. Keep them for my sake.’

Bonnie cast her eyes over the paper that had been placed in her hands, on which were these lines inscribed:—

‘O let me while away the hour
Where all the joys of love abound,
Still ling’ring where the deathless flower
Of beauty only can be found.
Where youth and beauty meet to-day,
There let me cast this simple crown ;

Then softly dream the hours away,
Till youth claim beauty for its own.

'Tis but a simple wreath I lay,
The flowers in my heart have grown ;
If thou wouldst save them from decay,
Then must they live for thee alone.
Farewell ; and though relentless fate
Should call me ere my work be done,
Still joyous days upon thee wait,
And youth claim beauty for its own.'

Bonnie Beauclerc had fallen to her knees ; the hard worldliness of this girl had yielded itself up, for the moment at least, to the finer instincts of our nature. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud. But Willie Lambton had passed already beyond the reach of earthly sorrow. His eyes were closed now, and the same soft smile continued to play over his features as they settled slowly into eternal rest.

Lemuel was there watching as the night passed in its course, and when the midnight hour was at hand the nurse moved restlessly about, for to her practised eye the change was becoming imminent. It was not just yet, however, and the deep silence continued broken only by the monotonous cry of the watchman on his beat.

‘ Half-past twelve and a fine starry night!’

And the night was fair as ever eye rested upon, wherein no cloud was spread ’twixt earth and heaven; but ere the watch had come on his rounds again there was a silence that was deeper still in the quaint old house in Lincoln’s Inn. Lemuel had already implanted a kiss on the cold forehead of his friend, and was hastening through the deserted streets in the direction of Westminster.



CHAPTER IV.

IT was the second night of the debate in the House of Commons on a proposed vote of censure upon the Ministers, and men of all shades of political opinion were disturbed and excited. The Opposition mustered in strength; their argument had been but feebly met, and the issue of the division hung doubtfully in the balance. The whips on either side had exerted themselves strenuously to bring up every man whose vote could be relied upon, and the House was crowded, and eager.

Speeches at that period had commonly an effect of which the cheap press has since deprived them. Men entered upon a discussion with open minds, prepared to listen and to be instructed; they were susceptible to the influences of oratory, and were amenable to the force of logic; they were capable, in fact, of being converted and convinced. A notable speech determined not infrequently twenty, thirty, or even a still larger number of votes on the very eve of a division. But this has been changed in our time. The influence of the press has progressed until it has become more potent than Parliament itself; and its editors are the unlicensed legislators of the day. The question of the hour is thrashed out, sifted, turned round, and inside out, and its every phase

considered and discussed before it reaches the Legislature. Nay, the vote is declared to have been taken, and it is proclaimed aloud that the ayes have it, or the noes. It is proclaimed from the house-tops that public opinion is made up : it remains for the House to place it on record by its more formal proceedings. It is but rarely that anything said there reverses the popular verdict.

It was a question of foreign policy that now filled the air with thunder. The Opposition had had the best of the discussion so far, and it seemed as if they were destined to carry all before them, for the best speakers on the side of the Government had failed to produce any effect either by argument or menace. It needed an heroic effort to redeem the lost ground, and it

was in such a moment as this that men were wont to look to Lemuel's brilliant and fearless rhetoric to turn the tide of battle. But he was nowhere to be found, and the messengers despatched in haste returned from a fruitless errand. Lemuel had not been at his lodgings since the early morning, neither was he to be heard of at his club. Midnight approached, and more and more impatient became the opponents of the Government to close the debate and snatch their victory. Speaker after speaker had risen on the Government side to prolong the discussion, and thus afford time for the champion to enter the lists and, as it was hoped, with his wonted success. James Mowbray was thus engaged in conducting the forlorn

hope, when of a sudden the whisper ran along the Government benches that Leverson was at hand. And soon an outburst of cheers from the sorely-pressed Ministerialists confirmed the rumour, and gave evidence of the hopes that were excited in the minds of the party by the welcome reinforcement. It was a veritable sensation of relief, akin to that with which the inhabitants of a beleagured town recognise from their battlements the approach of the succouring column. And the reception accorded was worthy of the occasion.

It was half-past two when Lemuel entered the House. To those who observed him closely Lemuel appeared to be a shade paler, perhaps, than was usual with him, but in other respects there was

little to indicate that he had come to the House direct from the death-bed of his friend. He had come at the last moment, indeed, and the patience of the House had been sorely tried ; but when Lemuel arose the supporters of the Government gave expression to their satisfaction in prolonged and vigorous applause. And Lemuel did not disappoint his friends. From the outset it was manifest that he had set himself to make a supreme effort ; and, as the well-balanced sentences rang through the House, the enthusiasm grew. His task was the more difficult, inasmuch as the arguments in defence of the policy pursued by the Government had been exhausted already ; it only remained by arranging them in another and more picturesque and forcible form to convey the

idea of novelty, and to carry the imaginations of men away with him in his enthusiastic advocacy.

It was felt that Lemuel had surpassed himself to-night,—had done more than justice to his reputation, and, late though it was, there was even a cry to him to continue when his speech was drawing to a conclusion.

‘Samson hath quit himself like Samson,’

was the observation of the Prime Minister, when the announcement of the numbers made known that the Government had secured the majority. ‘Leverson is the right arm of our right arm : he has but to name his reward, and none is too high.’

But there was one present, though Lemuel was not aware of it, by whom

he had been observed with keen eyes. Early in the night Daphne had taken her place in that portion of the House which is supposed to be sufficiently veiled to allow of the presence of woman's bright eyes without serious interference with the independence of Parliament. Daphne had come to the House with high expectations. The verdict of the constituencies at the last election was, she hoped, to be reversed to-night, and the occasion would be afforded of restoring the borough of Bedborough to its hereditary allegiance. Lemuel was poor, and Daphne understood the power of riches, and there was no reason to question the accuracy of her estimate had the occasion presented itself. But Lemuel's timely advent had dashed her hopes and defeated her calculations.

From the moment when Lemuel entered the House Daphne's eyes had been fixed upon him ; and, as the ringing cheers rising louder and louder testified to the appreciation of his hearers, her indignation against the man increased in intensity.

When the House broke up Daphne, like the rest, hastened to seek her carriage. Lord Beauport had not accompanied her ; he was too much disgusted with his defeat to consent to set foot within the precincts of the House as a spectator only, and Daphne, unattended, mingled with the crowd in Westminster Hall. She was still waiting when a cheer in the distance caught her ear. It was taken up and continued, and soon a crowd composed of members and the general public alike

were seen surrounding two central figures, who with some difficulty were making their way to Palace Yard. Daphne did not, owing to the distance, distinguish the objects of this spontaneous ovation : she awaited their approach, and, when within a few paces, recognised the Prime Minister walking arm-in-arm with Lemuel Leverson. Soon they were close at hand, and the plaudits were more vehement than ever. For an instant Lemuel's eyes encountered Daphne's, and the glance of recognition entered her very soul. On his side Lemuel recalled at that moment the hour when he had seen Daphne receive her husband exultingly under circumstances somewhat similar in that place ; when Beauport, fresh from New-market, had delivered the speech that

Lemuel had written for him, and had not acknowledged the obligation.

Lemuel was above the ostentation of triumph, indeed, more especially where a woman was concerned ; but for Daphne, whose feelings had been wrought to a high pitch of excitement, the additional sensation of mortified pride was more than she could bear. All power of self-control seemed to abandon her on the instant, — she felt that she could have rushed at Lemuel's throat like some wild animal. But her strength failed her ; she reeled like one that is intoxicated, and in another moment had fallen insensible to the ground.

Ere a month had elapsed from the date of Lemuel's signal success in the House of Commons, a still greater triumph awaited

him. His services to the Government had been transcendent; and, as the Prime Minister had himself borne witness, no recompense could be deemed too great. It was not, therefore, any surprise to Parliament or to the country to hear that Lemuel had been offered a seat in the Cabinet. Even Nestor, though a critic by habit, had no word of censure.

‘Leverson has had the start of me by quarter of a century,’ Nestor was heard to observe; ‘at this pace he will be Prime Minister ere he is fifty. He was born to it; ’tis in his face; and unless evil fortune strike him with the blow of a sledge hammer, he will outrun us all.’

And that a man still under thirty should be promoted to the Cabinet was an extraordinary distinction, such as might well

be expected to turn his head ; but with Lemuel it was not so. He appeared to accept the honour and the responsibility of it as if, to use Nestor's expression, it had been his birthright. No man understood better than Lemuel, or appreciated more thoroughly, the glittering eminence to which he had been raised ; but it was precisely because he understood it that he was enabled to bear his elevation with equanimity. The world was on its knees, and the smoke of its incense that would have excited the brain of another man to intoxication, passed away in harmless clouds. Lemuel was as calm in the hour of triumph as he had been unmoved in the days of his obscurity ; and men marvelled at his magnanimity, and women were afraid.

With Lemuel there was not, however, any sense of satisfied ambition to tranquillise the mind, such as in the case of so many conduces to indolence. On the contrary, the success which had attended his efforts hitherto only sharpened his appetite for yet loftier distinctions. His desire was to govern and direct. He was not content with the possession of such power as every Cabinet Minister shares with his colleagues. After all, the ordinary Minister must bend to the Premier and to the majority ; he can only aspire to have his way by means of argument and persuasion, and to ambition such as Lemuel's this was a yoke and a thralldom still. He aimed at the first place, and was indisposed to think with the great Roman orator, that he

might stop with honour at the second or the third.

But the time had come for the mask to fall, and Lemuel recognised it. The passion that had been held in such rigid restraint need be kept so no longer; nay, the hour was at hand when it was incumbent upon him to show himself even as he was.

It was an afternoon in the first days of August that Lemuel called at Shetland House. A year and more had elapsed since he had been seen within its precincts, but the events that had happened in the interval were such as to justify his self-confidence; for even the most highly placed are not insensible to the influences of success. A Cabinet Minister stands upon a pinnacle;

he is a social duke ; and where is man or woman to be found that shall close the door in his face ? He bears about him a golden key that shall turn every lock, a talisman, an open sesame, before which every bolt is drawn. Even Daphne had grown silent since Lemuel's elevation ; she had been fairly stunned by it, and no longer wearied the duchess with denunciations of Lemuel's treachery. Not Juno, with her golden filleted steeds, had hastened to Olympus with greater persistency to rouse the gods against Troy, than had Daphne endeavoured with ceaseless labour to incite society against Lemuel. But she had been defeated. Society will not hear that man denounced who has been crowned in public. It is too late ; he is out of

reach ; the seal has been set upon his fame, and society will have a share in it. Men would not listen any longer, and women made excuses when Daphne was vehement. It remained for her to conceal her chagrin and to bury her fierce resentment as best she might beneath a semblance of indifference.

Like the rest of the world, the Duchess of Shetland received Lemuel with open arms, but there was in her case a motive beyond that which influenced society in general. Muriel had pined like some tropical plant bereft of the sun ; and the duchess had vainly endeavoured to distract her mind from the brooding sorrow that seemed to have made its permanent abode there. Muriel was, in fact, very ill, and the

duchess had of late become seriously alarmed.

She must be saved, was the thought that suggested itself to the duchess when Lemuel's name was announced ; and, after all, it can surely be no discredit that Muriel should have for her husband the most brilliant man in England.

But when Lemuel presented himself before her once more, it was apparent that a change had come over Muriel : he was received with the old warmth no longer. To Lemuel the change was unmistakable, and he knew not how to account for it, except that the reasons for his long absence had been misunderstood or misrepresented, and that there had been none to tell Muriel the truth.

With downcast eyes she sat. To her the intrigues whereby Daphne had succeeded in excluding Lemuel from her presence were unknown, and she could but attribute his long absence to indifference or worse. Muriel's pride had been hurt, and she was unable to conceal it if she would. They were alone together, and the silence was embarrassing.

‘Shall I sing to you as of old?’ Lemuel asked at length. ‘I recollect that it was not disagreeable to you in other days.’

The guitar with which Lemuel had accompanied his voice so often, and charmed and fascinated Muriel's ear, was in its old place, and its familiar notes were evoked with all the old tenderness and skill:—

' Say not for ever, 'tis not kindly
In hearts that once true love have known,
Be it wildly, be it blindly,
They may not now their love disown.

'Twas not the folly of an hour,
All wanton as a summer wind
That rudely shakes the tender flower,
And only leaves the wreck behind.

'Twas not the thought that's lightly shaken,
That withers at the first reproof ;
'Twas not a fancy idly taken ;
'Twas tender and 'twas faithful love.'

The soft melody of Lemuel's voice as it died away had gone straight to Muriel's heart, and had awakened to its depths all the old love that yet smouldered there. In another moment she had fallen into Lemuel's arms, while he clasped her to his bosom : they were never more to regard each other but as husband and wife.

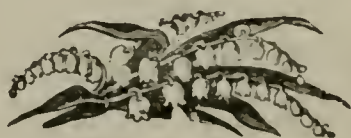
The happiness that culminated in

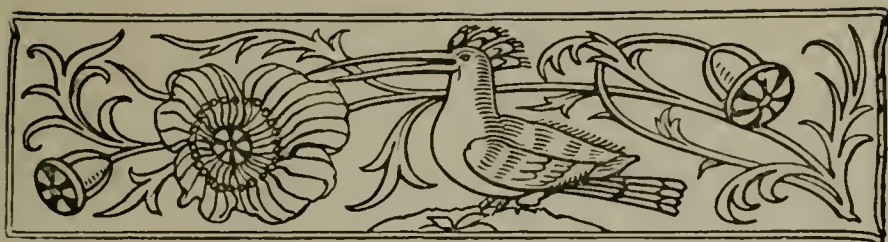
Lemuel's marriage was of no ordinary kind. To Muriel it was the return of joyous and triumphant youth that seemed to have passed away for ever. It was a golden dream that had been realised to the letter—a fairy tale of happiness immeasurable that had been more than fulfilled. It was the commencement of the summer of life after an unpropitious spring, and the long, joyous days seemed to be all too brief for her. As a bird that cowers by the earth whilst the thunders rolls overhead, and the blinding storm fills the air with darkness, then plumes its wings in the sunshine, and, soaring aloft in the liquid air, makes all heaven glad with its song, even so had Muriel forgotten already the past in the abounding happiness that

surrounded her. And, if the present was thus prosperous, there was, so far as eye could scan, no cloud to threaten in the future. Over hill and dale spread the fair landscape, and even to the uttermost horizon, where the mist hangs as a veil and bounds our vision, no speck was there to mar the enchanting prospect. It was the halcyon hour when love and youth unite ; when the breath of paradise seems to be poured out again upon this earth of ours.

And Lemuel, what shall we say of him ? That love of his, so carefully guarded, had broken its bonds at last, and rushed now in an impetuous torrent that knew no measure and would submit to no restraint. It was the love that comes but once to such a nature ; it

is too passionate and too strong to be repeated. A man lives with it and dies with it : he does not survive it. When death comes, it finds him still clinging to this his first and last love, still folding to his breast the treasure of a lifetime.





CHAPTER V.

‘**I** HAVE but this moment come from Shetland House,’ said Miniver Green, on meeting Crispeyn Caramel in the street. ‘I had called to congratulate the duchess on the auspicious event.’

‘Auspicious event!’ repeated Crispeyn. ‘Pray, what do you call the auspicious event? The marriage of Lady Muriel with Lemuel Leverson? I regard it as one more blow aimed at our great houses, for that is what it comes to. How can our aristocracy hope to be

respected, if they cease thus to respect themselves?’

‘My dear sir, you may be quite accurate in what you say,’ Miniver replied, ‘but I did not consider the matter in this light. In the present case there is wealth on the one side and intelligence on the other, and in the combination of both lies, I apprehend, the foundation of all aristocracy. Be that as it may, however, the fact is that I invariably congratulate. It may be a habit—probably it is so at my time of life—but most people like it, I find, be the circumstances what they may. For myself, I detest your professional mourners over other people’s affairs; your men who parade the town kerchief in hand; your Niobes with hearts of stone.

Nobody wants them, and their presence is desired least where there is something real to deplore. But you and I are men of the world, and understand each other. To us every marriage is "auspicious," and every birth a "happy event." 'Tis ridiculous to discriminate in matters of this kind.'

'I agree with you,' Crispeyn replied, 'that it is best as a rule to take a cheerful view of the events that happen around us, and I should have been disposed to do so now had it been a matter of vice or of virtue that was in question, only moral issues that were involved; but, where a social crime of magnitude has been perpetrated, society is bound, in my opinion, to make a stand, and, in self-defence, to mark its displeasure. I mean to do my

duty. I have not called at Shetland House.'

'Society does not seem to have adopted your view of the case,' said Miniver; 'indeed, the doors of Shetland House are only to be approached with difficulty, such is the sympathising multitude. With the exception of Lady Beauport, every one with whom I am acquainted has left cards.'

And Miniver had spoken the truth. Society understood its interests, and had hastened to pay its respects to the fortunate neophyte.

The announcement of Lemuel's marriage with Lady Muriel Bellecourt had filled Daphne's mind with rage. It was the crowning of the edifice of Lemuel's prosperity, and placed him at once and

for ever, she felt, out of reach of her vengeance. The visions of retribution with which Daphne had been sustained hitherto, under the mortification of defeat, vanished on the instant, and nought remained for her but blank despair. She had been outwitted from the beginning and outmanœuvred at every point. It was more than one of Daphne's temperament could well bear, and she stormed and chafed under it. Throughout the long nights she knew no rest, for sleep had abandoned her eyelids. Soon a violent fever seized upon her, and for weeks together Daphne lay between life and death.

When Muriel was informed of the peril in which Daphne lay, her first impulse was to hasten to her side, there

to render such aid as she might ; indeed, it was with some difficulty that those who understood the circumstances better succeeded in dissuading her at first from accomplishing her wish. Muriel had no knowledge of the fiery passions that agitated Daphne's breast ; they had no existence in her own gentle nature, and she failed altogether to comprehend them.

Daphne was convalescent now ; the fever had abated ,and Muriel sought, with womanly tenderness, permission to visit the sick-room. The patient's strength had returned but slowly ; she must not be excited, the doctor said, for the exhaustion that followed the fever had been severe. She was sleeping when Muriel entered noiselessly and took

her place by Daphne's side, awaiting the moment of returning consciousness.

It was growing dark, when at length Daphne awoke. She failed to recognise Muriel at first ; but there was a strange glare in her eyes when Muriel spoke. Daphne made no response to the affectionate greeting. She raised herself to observe more closely her visitor, to satisfy herself, as it seemed, of Muriel's identity, but the discovery was more than her fevered brain could bear. With the bound of a tigress from the jungle she sprang upon Muriel's neck, and felled her to the ground at one blow. It was the work of an instant, and it was complete.

Giving utterance to a frantic cry of triumph, Daphne stood erect contemplating her victim, whilst the terrified attendants were hastening to the spot. And there was not any time to be lost, for Daphne had her hands on Muriel's throat already when the noise of the encounter summoned assistance. A desperate struggle ensued ere Daphne, who seemed to be endowed with strength that was almost superhuman, could be separated from the object of her vengeance. As it was, it appeared to be doubtful whether she had not in fact succeeded in accomplishing her purpose, for Muriel, who was now bleeding profusely, lay prostrate and motionless.

The calm which succeeded the first paroxysms of her illness had deceived

Daphne's attendants; they failed altogether to recognise the depth and intensity of the passions which had brought it about, and which yet burnt fiercely within her. To those about her it was a fever, and nothing more; and by them the startling outcome of Muriel's visit was wholly unanticipated.

Many weeks elapsed before Daphne was again convalescent; for the recent excitement had brought on a fresh access of her disorder; but she was more tranquil—the fever seemed to have spent itself in the savage outburst of fury wherein her thirst for revenge had culminated. For Muriel the effects were more serious, however. Her fragile frame had been shattered by the awful ordeal through which she had passed.

The pale lily that lifts its head in the sun and in the shelter, but is crushed and bruised and done to death by the first rough blast of the autumn was not more frail. Timid by nature, and gentle, the shock came to her as a death-blow—from which she was destined never to raise her head again. The colour had departed from Muriel's cheek, and she lifted up her eyes no more, save to look into those of her husband with undying love. She was not deceived as to her state; she knew now that the world was passing away, and there was but one thought in her heart—that she might be reunited to him, whom she had so loved, in the world to come. Would that Lemuel believed as she did! What a load of sorrow would be removed from

his heart ; sorrow that knew nothing of hope, sorrow that deepened and grew more hideous even as the light faded, and the everlasting night came on apace. But such a change is not a thing of sentiment, to be arranged while the clock strikes ; it needs for some the study and the thought of a lifetime. What could she hope to effect in the space of a death - bed ? And Muriel seemed to comprehend the situation at a glance ; all her faculties appeared to be quickened within her. It was with her as with so many when death is near ; the supernatural was breaking in, superseding the natural order before its time, as it were. The soul yearning for its proper sphere, restless under its bonds and breaking away, is already in advance of

time, and is entering on the confines of eternity.

From the height of pride and of human felicity Lemuel had been struck down headlong, and he reeled under the blow and fell to the earth. To such a nature as his the stroke was overwhelming in its effects. The depth and the strength of his love for Muriel was not to be gauged by the ordinary standard of ordinary men ; it had become an essential portion of his being ; it was to Lemuel almost what the soul is to others, the abstract, all but divine element of his existence. If there were immortality at all, to him it appeared that his love would be imperishable. The world, and the glory of it, and lofty ambition, and the triumph of success, and the shout of the multitude, and the en-

thusiasm of the leadership, all alike were growing dim, and losing their lustre in his eyes. From Lemuel life itself seemed to be slowly ebbing away, even as hers was from whose side he was but rarely absent now.

The season in London had come to an end, and Muriel had proceeded by easy stages to her home in the country. It was a secluded old place, which Muriel had inherited through a long line of ancestors, many of them distinguished in their day in the arts both of peace and of war. And she was glad to escape from the turmoil of the town. The old house was associated in her mind with the days of her childhood, and their hundred incidents; those happy days when she had lived here with her parents, free from

care. And to Muriel it seemed fitting that she should return hither to die.

The summer was slowly wasting away, and the days were growing shorter, and the sadness that comes with the approach of winter was already perceptible. Lemuel sat by Muriel's side day by day. In silence they gazed upon the fair landscape that was spread before them, over the far-reaching park to the blue hills beyond, and the ancestral woods that were mellow already with the autumn tints. To Muriel they recalled the happy hours she had passed at Weobly in Lemuel's society, and amid kindred scenes, when they wandered together, and she wondered whether he had guessed the love that she cherished in her heart.

And soon the winter was at hand, and

the leaves fell silently with every breath of the fitful west wind, and a melancholy sense of decay seemed to overshadow the place. Muriel lay on a couch at the open window ; she was pale and wan, but in her face was the unspeakable beauty that comes of a spotless life. Her eyes were fixed upon the cloudless heaven, but in her heart of hearts there was a deep-set sorrow even while her spirit was raised above and beyond earthly things.

‘I should like to have seen Daphne again,’ Muriel remarked, after a pause ; ‘to have taken her by the hand, to forgive and be forgiven.’

‘To forgive—perhaps so,’ Lemuel replied ; ‘it is better, even for our own peace, than to bear the heavy burden of

hate about with us. But — to be forgiven?’

‘Yes,’ continued Muriel, ‘even though it be for some fancied wrong, some phantom fault. Let us go to our rest, my dearest, you and I, leaving no burning hearts behind us, but rather with words of peace upon our lips.’

Lemuel made no reply, and there was silence for a space between them, when Muriel, taking his hand in hers, recited aloud a prayer that had been familiar to her from childhood.

‘O Father in thy mighty Heaven,
Ever may thy name be blessed,
While trusting to thy promise given,
Here we seek to find thy rest.

And still on thee our sorrows casting,
Waiting on thy awful will ;
We cry to thee, thou Everlasting :
Be our friend and Father still.

Our daily bread on thee depending,
Grant unto our daily prayer ;
And still against thy law offending,
Still, O still, thy children spare.

Forgive them even as forgiving
Mortals from their conflicts cease ;
From evils keep us still while living—
Dying, grant eternal peace.'

Lemuel repeated the words as Muriel pronounced them in a slow and solemn tone ; and when her voice had ceased he added instinctively, 'Amen.' He knew not why he had done so, and Muriel did not appear to have observed it, for her eyes were closed, and she had fallen into a gentle sleep. From the sweet expression that seemed to steal over her features, it appeared as if her mind were dwelling on some vision of happiness. It was a look such as Lemuel had often

seen there when life was yet all bright and joyous.

He knelt by her side and sought in vain to conceal the emotion that was rapidly getting the better of him. Presently, breaking from restraint, it found expression, despite his efforts, in a passionate outburst of grief that would not be suppressed. Fearful of the effect upon Muriel's enfeebled nerves, Lemuel, as soon as he could control himself sufficiently, made an effort to withdraw for a space without attracting her attention. But Muriel did not appear to have taken any notice, she lay as before.

Lemuel started to his feet—a frightful thought had occurred to him: was she sleeping now, or was it—

Another moment, a moment of agony unspeakable that seemed to convert his brain to fire, and Lemuel had fallen to the ground. Muriel had closed her eyes to this world for ever.





CHAPTER VI.

‘**T**HIS affair of Stanhope’s is the talk of the town,’ said Miniver Green as he settled himself for a quiet chat in Bonnie Beauclerc’s boudoir. ‘I have just returned from the court, and have laughed all the way. ’Pon my life, people should not be such fools; it brings discredit upon our age and civilisation.’

‘I have heard nothing of it,’ Bonnie Beauclerc replied; ‘and I have been longing for information all the day. Only imagine what must have been my

state of anxiety! How has the case gone?' Bonnie inquired with eager curiosity. 'Has it been decided?'

'Decided? Oh dear, no!' responded Miniver. 'I am happy to be able to say we are not half done with it yet. The tit-bits are still to come!'

Here Miniver lay back in his chair and indulged in a peal of laughter, ending with a fit of coughing that was all but dangerous.

But Bonnie was impatient; her curiosity had been excited to the highest pitch.

'O you tiresome man!' she exclaimed, 'why don't you proceed?'

As soon as Miniver had recovered his voice and had dried the tears from his eyes, he prepared to resume his narrative.

‘Well, the case was from the commencement looked upon as little better than a joke by the judge, jury, and all concerned, a welcome relaxation from more serious duties that afforded the court, from the bench to the bailiffs, an opportunity for the exercise of their wit all round. So it seemed to me at least. Indeed, the laughter became general, and very nearly continuous, after the delivery of the first half-dozen sentences of the counsel who spoke on behalf of the petitioner; and long before the advocate for the respondent—’

‘Do, pray, not drive me to madness,’ interrupted Bonnie, stamping her pretty little foot impatiently as she spoke, ‘by talking this legal jargon. What on earth do I know of petitioners and respond-

ents? For goodness' sake, who and what are they?'

'My dear Miss Beauclerc,' responded Miniver, who was somewhat taken aback by Bonnie's vehemence, 'I beg a thousand pardons; you see the fact is I have been in court all day, where one hears nothing else, and I have only now—'

'Oh, pray, don't apologise!' Bonnie exclaimed, with an air of suffering, 'but proceed.'

'Then to continue,' said Miniver. 'The petitioner is poor, dear Stanhope; and, as you are aware, he prays for a judicial separation from his wife.'

'On what ground?'

'Why, incompati—'

But here Miniver lost control over his

feelings once more, and a fresh peal of laughter, in which Bonnie now joined in the shrillest of trebles, drowned the remainder of the sentence.

‘Poor, dear Stanhope!’ cried Miniver, as soon as he had recovered the use of speech.

‘I don’t pity him in the least,’ exclaimed Bonnie, who had only partially resumed her composure. ‘Did he really flatter himself that a girl such as Egidia would marry him for love?’

‘I am sure I cannot say,’ replied Miniver, ‘what were Stanhope’s precise views on that point; it may seem to be incredible, but I think the jury will find no difficulty in accepting the theory of his simplicity nevertheless.’

‘I am really astonished that the case

has lasted so long,' remarked Bonnie. 'Surely the facts, at any rate, don't admit of much controversy?'

'In the ordinary course the case would have come to an end to-day,' said Miniver; 'and I had gone down to court in the full expectation of a verdict; but it happened, unluckily, that there was an accident—'

'An accident!'

'Yes, an accident, which made it necessary to adjourn. Indeed, it was an awkward affair altogether. Stanhope had hardly entered the witness-box and commenced to narrate his experiences of married life, when one of the jurors was taken alarmingly ill, and had to be assisted out of court.'

'Poor man!' exclaimed Bonnie in a

tone of conventional commiseration. 'I hope and trust that his indisposition did not prove to be serious.'

'Oh, not in the least,' replied Miniver. 'Indeed, I satisfied myself on that point by inquiring of the counsel for the petitioner—pardon me, I mean Stanhope—who happened to be at hand.'

'And what did he say?'

'He assured me it was nothing in particular, only that the man had split his sides!'

Miniver Green was once more in hysterics, and, under the influence of uproarious hilarity, he appeared for a time to incur some risk of accomplishing in his own person the feat which had been flippantly attributed to the invalided jurymen. And to Bonnie Beauclerc the story

of Sanctimonious Stanhope's matrimonial troubles afforded no less amusement.

Miniver Green was altogether in his element when narrating a social scandal of this kind, more especially when, as in the present case, the parties concerned were his friends. Tales such as this are, indeed, the tit-bits of the boudoir gastronome. On them he thrives and grows fat, and founds a reputation. It is the sort of gossip that pleases the most; it needs no effort of the mind to take it in; it is pleasure without alloy; and to the laughter-loving the hour so spent is the most grateful of the day. It is the social chatter that is, beyond all other, acceptable, for it is at once gratifying and grotesque. The troubles of our neighbours, and more particularly of our

intimates, have a flavour and a solace in them at all times ; but when tinged with humour, they are past price. They refresh and exhilarate, and, as the narrative proceeds, men hold their sides.

Stanhope had, in fact, been reduced to a state bordering on desperation by the vagaries of his wife. Indeed, Lemuel's forecast of the Book of Job had been amply fulfilled, with the exception that Stanhope had departed so far, from the example of his prototype, as fairly to lose his patience at last, and to have recourse to the law for consolation and redress.

Sanctimonious Stanhope established his case for a judicial separation, but this was hardly to be reckoned as an advantage so far as Egidia was concerned.

Her husband yet lived,—this was her grievance; the knot was still tied as firmly as before, and to Egidia, in her impatience, it appeared that it would remain so indefinitely. To her the death of Lemuel's wife opened up a whole vista of a possible future that dazzled and excited her imagination, a future in which she believed as something more than a possibility. The vision of this man, the nimbus of fame that hovered above him, the mystery that hung over and about him, even the wealth of which he was now the possessor, all went to make up an individuality that to Egidia was absorbingly attractive. She longed for the position of a great man's wife; to her the situation in which she found herself was unbearable, and it became the

more so as the conviction grew and assumed shape that Lemuel might even now be hers were she free to marry him. Egidia had not forgotten the time when as yet she believed that Lemuel was a millionaire, when she loitered with him in the conservatory, and the soft strains of the musicians were even hard and rough in her ears compared with the accents of his tuneful voice. But Egidia was deceived in those days; and when the fabulous wealth had melted away she returned to the dance with all the old relish. Her affections never got out of hand.

Now again had things changed for her, and with them had Egidia too altered her views. Lemuel had become not only wealthy but famous as well; why then

should not the confidences of the conservatory be renewed ?

When a man is in affliction, say the wise ones, the time of woman's opportunity has come. Let her pour into the troubled ear soft words of comfort, words that open up a future before him when to all appearance there is none, and the chances are that he will ask her to share it. Man is not her equal in the circumstances ; logic is at a discount and close reasoning out of place. It is a matter of sentiment, not of judgment or of science, and the statesman or the politician falls as ready a victim as any other.

And this Egidia understood ; her only misgiving, indeed, had reference to Lemuel's inscrutable personality. That

he was not like the rest of men was one of the characteristics that surrounded him with an air of mystery and acted as a spell. It fascinated and attracted with an irresistible impulse wherein woman's curiosity was magnified tenfold by reason of the softer feelings that grew up by its side. But Egidia was not daunted by the manifest difficulties before her; she was full of self-reliance, and a woman with a strong will is successful for the most part in having her way.

‘Follow your man whithersoever he goeth, he will end by following you.’

It is a wise saw, oh ye wise women of the world, and we do not quote it to your disparagement. How many among you have proved its truth and are rejoicing to-day! Egidia Stanhope was

of you: why was she not to profit by your experience? Why should she fall thus far behind her sisters?

Lemuel had vanished in the meantime no man could say whither. It was no longer death that he dreaded in these days, it was life; the harrowing prospect of a protracted existence, when all that makes life dear and precious to us is gone from it for ever. To Lemuel the Eastern custom, whereby the widow refuses to survive the loss of her husband and casts herself on the funeral pyre, seemed now to be the natural and appropriate ending of a life that had been grafted upon and interlaced with that of another. How was the one, be it husband or wife, to be torn apart from the other without leaving the gaping wounds through which the life-

blood would flow? And why should this wreck and ruin linger on? In mercy let it die; in the name of humanity let it perish. Nature had committed a fault in rendering such a separation possible: it was for man to supply the remedy. But death came not at Lemuel's bidding, the load of life was yet laid heavily upon him, and it had to be borne about whithersoever he wandered in his pilgrimage.

Lemuel had turned his back upon the land of his birth for ever. That he should contemplate again the scenes that Muriel had gazed upon was torture to him; he would have run away from his thoughts if he might, but they pursued him like the triple Furies armed with whips and scorpions. It was oblivion that he sought, and it was nowhere to be found. He had

no longer anything to live for, and for him the grave had neither hopes nor fears beyond it. Life had been to Lemuel a grand and noble drama, a strain of music, now solemn, now joyous and playful, now sinking to a wail in soft and sacred melody. But its harmony had been destroyed by a rude note of discord, and its triumphant song broken off of a sudden. Men were startled at the abruptness of it, and philosophised in whispers over the uncertainties of life and the shortcomings of humanity.

But Lemuel was out of sight already, flying away from his home and his country, even as men have been wont to fly from a plague-stricken city, not daring even to look back. From place to place he hurried with feverish impetuosity, still

impelled he knew not by what instinct, and he cared not whither.

To Paris he had bent his steps—fair and glorious Paris, paragon of the earth!—but for him its glittering lights had no brightness in them. Its fountains leaped in the sunshine and the gay crowds danced and sang, but Lemuel sat apart; he was not of them, and the laughter of the light-hearted made him even sadder than before. The weary day wore out, and the shades of evening gathered apace, and the bells were sounding for the Ave Maria when men stay their hands in prayer. And to Lemuel's mind there was a voice in those soft chimes that soothed his fevered brain, even though it recalled with burning intensity the bitterness of the past.

O sad, sad memories !
Still echoing through misty time,
Your voice is in the evening bell
In ev'ry silver chime.

Sweet solemn memories !
You call me from your home of light,
As softly still your voice is borne
Upon the wings of night.

O voice of memory !
You break upon my tired ear,
You rend again the bleeding wound,
And still are welcome there !

Lemuel reposed his head upon his hand
whilst his thoughts thus wandered on. It
was not yet night—

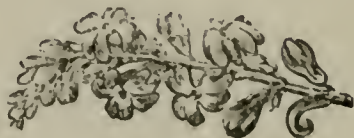
‘ When heaven wakes with all his eyes ! ’

but the shadows were fast darkening
around.

Lemuel had strayed in the direction of
the proud monument whereon are recorded
the hundred victories of the marvellous
Corsican, and the long lines of light that

diverge thence in endless succession through the city as the night sets in, were just waking into life, when a figure stopped abruptly before the place where he rested. Lemuel had not perceived the approach of the stranger, and was unconscious of his presence until startled from his reverie by hearing his own name pronounced by a voice that was unfamiliar to him.

‘ Mercy on us ! Levenson, can this be you ? ’





CHAPTER VII.

DIONIS was a modern magician. His method was quite different from that affected by the ancient necromancers; they shrouded themselves in darkness, and it was part of their art to conceal the mysterious ways whereby they succeeded in becoming the familiars of the dead. But Dionis was as open as the day. He maintained that there was nothing to conceal; that the phenomena wherein he played a part came to pass by agencies which were neither more nor less

intelligible to him than to anybody else. His susceptibility to the presence of the supernatural was an accident that had developed itself unsought, and which, being there, was, he conceived, bestowed for a purpose, to be exercised in fact, not to be laid aside or neglected.

In days gone by Lemuel had known Dionis in England; he was then only commencing his career, and Lemuel's incredulity regarding the existence of the supernatural had caused him to treat with contempt the pretensions which Dionis put forward to relations with the unseen. But in Paris Dionis had acquired fame; and men and women, attracted by curiosity, had been terrified well-nigh out of their wits at last by the phantoms summoned from amongst the illustrious dead

of every age and of every clime that Dionis produced before their eyes. And he added, if that were possible, to the weirdness of what he did by professing all the while to be no wiser than the rest, to be helpless and unable to explain the mystery in which he was engaged, or why or wherefore he was the selected channel of communication between this world and the next.

To Lemuel, in his present disposition, the meeting with such a man, for it was Dionis that had unexpectedly addressed him, had a strange excitement in it. Incredulous as Lemuel continued to be concerning a future state of existence, he yet longed and thirsted for some power, if such there were upon the earth, some reasonable evidence that

might even now shake his unbelief. Could he have persuaded himself, like the rest of men, that death is not annihilation, Lemuel could have risen to his feet and looked the world in the face once more. It was in the presence of blank despair that he recoiled and shrunk away and refused to be comforted.

The strange pretensions of Dionis to exhibit proof positive of another and more exalted sphere of existence, proofs which he challenged the incredulous to test for themselves, produced in Lemuel's mind at this time a sensation of curiosity, however mingled with cynicism. But, then, what was there and what could he hope to find, save empty shadows, vain traditions, as he held

them, and beyond these brooding and illimitable darkness? No; there were, men said, here and there flickering lights to be discovered; this one had seen them and that; rifts in the dense cloud that shrouds our life in darkness; but what were they after all, Lemuel argued, but conjurors' tricks?

Approaching the confines of human experience, even straining his eyes, Lemuel beheld nothing beyond. It was black as the night that sat upon the waters ere yet the spirit of the Lord moved upon them; there was no progress to be made onwards, and it only remained to retrace his steps.

It was in such a frame of mind that Lemuel renewed his acquaintance with Dionis.

‘My right hand does not work a falsehood, neither does my left deceive me, of that, at least, I am certain,’ Dionis argued. ‘You must bear with me, then, if I should say to you that I am as sure of the future state as I am of the present. To me it is even more real. My intimates are no longer among the living—do not say that I am mad—my intimate relations are with the departed; nay, you will smile perhaps, the most intimate relations of all.’

‘For goodness’ sake explain yourself!’ Lemuel exclaimed, with sudden energy. ‘What on earth can you mean?’

‘There is ever a link between earth and heaven,’ Dionis replied calmly, ‘and it is more or less strong for each of us according to circumstances. You will be

taken aback by what I am about to say, perhaps, but again I ask you not to set me down for mad. I am really in my senses all the while as much as my neighbours. Well, then, I have a spirit-wife. You shall see her if you will—I do not mock you.'

Dionis spoke these words with seeming earnestness, and Lemuel hesitated to think that Dionis would deliberately attempt to deceive him; for, in early days, Lemuel had known the man as at least an honest visionary, one that succeeded in deceiving himself before he sought to deceive others. Lemuel had no difficulty, therefore, in accepting the invitation, though he had now a settled conviction that Dionis was no longer in his right mind.

In a *cul-de-sac* that opened off one of

the leading thoroughfares Dionis had fixed his abode. It was a peaceful, not to say gloomy, retreat, though situate in the midst of all that was brightest and gayest in Paris, and Dionis with a single attendant were its sole occupants. On arrival Lemuel was shown to a spacious apartment at the back of the house. There were no windows at the sides, only a skylight in the roof that could not be overlooked. It was already late, and Dionis was waiting to receive his visitor. In another moment they were standing together in the gaunt chamber which, rendered gloomy at all times by the high walls of the houses by which it was closely environed, was now nearly dark from the rapidly-failing light of day.

After the exchange of the usual greet-

ings Dionis closed and bolted the door, and, drawing Lemuel aside, sat by him in silence. For a time there was no sound, and Lemuel was becoming weary of his visit, when of a sudden, at the opposite extremity of the chamber, there was a flutter, as it were, of wings, and a mighty whirr as if some great bird had settled there. To this there succeeded a rush of wind that perceptibly stirred Lemuel's hair.

‘They are coming,’ whispered Dionis in a low voice; ‘the air is full of them to-night. You need not address the spirits when they appear, for they read our thoughts.’

He paused for a moment.

‘See!’ he exclaimed. ‘There, there—that is she.’

Lemuel turned his eyes in the direction indicated, but failed to perceive anything unusual.

‘Ah, your eyes are not so keen as mine for the nonce,’ continued Dionis; ‘love makes us wondrous observant.’

But Lemuel had no longer any difficulty in distinguishing the object to which Dionis had directed his attention, for a nebulous light had arisen from the floor apparently, diffused and devoid of shape at first. Soon there appeared the outline of a female form that became sharper and more defined at every instant, until each feature was plainly to be recognised. The eyes were turned upon Dionis with a mild and sweet expression, whilst the figure remained without motion.

‘Do not be alarmed,’ whispered Dionis,

taking Lemuel by the hand as he said so ; ‘ this is she of whom I spoke.’

Lemuel was disposed to resent the exhortation. Why should he of all men be disturbed ? Here was a conjuror’s trick, and it was well done ; but then it was not likely that Dionis would have acquired fame by any clumsy performance. Lemuel was even disposed to reward the spectacle by a round of merited applause, when his attention was aroused afresh by an exclamation from Dionis.

‘ Ah, there is another to-night, and this one for you. See ! see !’

Lemuel’s eyes were steadily fixed on Dionis, who was now advancing towards the figure of her whom he had described as his spirit-wife, and he seemed to be communing with her already, when

Lemuel became aware of the presence of a second luminous apparition, that came like the first. This time, however, it was close beside him ; it assumed shape quickly, and the outlines made themselves manifest with startling rapidity.

Lemuel was disturbed ; there was a chill in the air, he thought, and the noiseless presence affected him, despite himself, with a creeping terror. It was the experience of the Themanite :—

‘ There was a word spoken to me in private, and my ears, by stealth as it were, received the veins of its whisper. In the horror of a vision by night, when deep sleep is wont to hold men, fear seized upon me and trembling, and all my bones were affrighted. And when a

spirit passed before me the hair of my flesh stood up.'

Lemuel made a strong effort to shake himself free from the influence that had come over him,—to be worthy of himself; he inhaled a deep breath, and drew himself up to his full height.

But something has happened. There is a scared look in his eyes, and he reels now like a drunken man. His limbs refuse to sustain him any longer, and he staggers as if he would fall to the ground. His hands are raised to shut out the phantom from his agonised sight, and a cry escapes his lips and a bitter curse as Lemuel falls senseless on the marble pavement.

Scarce had the grey dawn begun to break over the great city, and long ere

the sun, lifting its head above the horizon, had tipped with gold the summit of temple and trophy, Lemuel was already hastening away from Paris, as he hoped for ever. His whole nature had undergone a shock, and he was labouring still under its influence.

He could not succeed in escaping from the recollection of the events of the previous night, and even now he was scared and startled. He could not explain what had occurred, but his mind dwelt upon it unceasingly. There was but one object ever present to his imagination, and it was in vain that he sought to set himself free; it seemed to have burnt itself into his brain, as it were, with a hot iron. Her image had been there; he had seen it, and it was

none other. It was Muriel even as he had looked upon her a thousand times and clasped her to his bosom, with the same happy smile and eyes that beamed with all the old tenderness.

‘Horrible feat!’ Lemuel exclaimed. ‘Or was it the creature of my own overheated brain? Or—was it—’

Lemuel checked himself. To admit the supernatural, even to hesitate on that subject, was, he felt, unworthy of him,—a renunciation of the thought of his lifetime. Had he not been fooled sufficiently already by this melodramatic conjuror, with his old wives’ tales? Was he at the bidding of this man to go back even to the nursery, to the belief in the witch and the hobgoblin, and to place trust in the necromancers and the array

of charlatans that had been from the beginning? And who was Dionis that he should be any better than they?

Lemuel felt that he had been practised upon, and that Dionis had succeeded with him as no other had done. Dionis had, he believed, discovered a weakness, and, having probed the innermost recesses of Lemuel's heart, had with ready villainy reopened the festering wound that he found there. From his soul Lemuel hated the man, nay, could have turned and slain him like a dog in his path. And still, as Lemuel hurried away from the choking atmosphere of the city, he could not but look back. After all, he had seen her image there; it seemed as if he could have put forth his hand and touched her, and yet Lemuel knew that he was not mad.

What if he should retrace his steps even now? True, he had cursed Dionis to his face; but there was fever in his brain then.

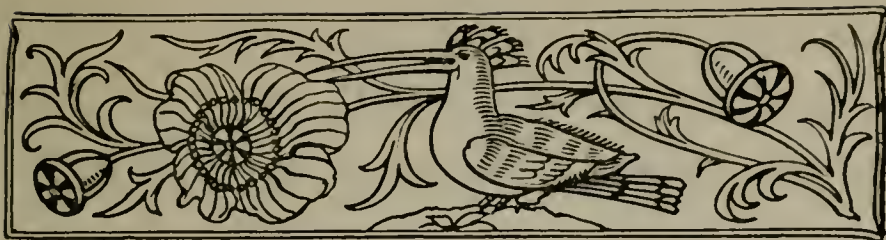
He would plead his cause; he would fall at Dionis's feet and crave forgiveness. Who knows but that once more, Lemuel argued, he might be permitted to see his lost one?

But the shadows of the night had vanished one by one as Lemuel proceeded on his journey, and all heaven had become glorious with the approach of the new day. He looked up into the blue sky, and inhaled the life-giving breath of the morning, and the weakness of a moment was banished from his heart for ever.

‘O vile and infamous deceivers! I have known you all my life!’ he exclaimed, ‘and despised you till now! You shall not

conquer me. Know that I am above you and beyond you. Begone to your holes and corners ; away to your hiding-places, ye ghouls and lingerers by the grave ! Your home is in the darkness, and you dare not face the day : it was not made for you. That is for the upright and the free !'





CHAPTER VIII.

AS a star from the firmament,
Lemuel had fallen from the
zenith of political life, and the
world was in amazement. The eyes of
the nation had been fixed upon his career ;
it was proud of him ; great things had
been expected, and now men were disap-
pointed and vexed.

‘ We must make allowances in such cases,
of course, but a successful politician is no
longer free to indulge his fantasy,’ Nestor
maintained ; ‘ it is quite unconstitutional.’
The public that raised him on its shoulders

has a claim to his services that is paramount to all private considerations ; he has no right to carry away with him into another station, or even into private life, the honours of office until such time, at least, as the public shall have received an adequate return for its confidence and generosity. It is robbery, I say, under the guise of sentiment.'

'I think you have laid down a sound principle,' said Miniver Green, 'one that commends itself on the ground of common honesty, if none other ; but, to speak practically, the instances of a man abandoning a prosperous public career by reason of private affliction are of such rare occurrence, that we can afford, it seems to me, to overlook this one, even if Leverson should persevere in his resolution. Ex-

perience, however, points to a different conclusion. A statesman who loses his wife is, as a rule, an object of greater interest than before; the women speculate upon him, and the chances are that he will not remain single long. We must needs speak guardedly, my dear sir, when approaching this region, of that I am conscious; but out of evil often comes good, and a young wife not infrequently gives a fillip to a middle-aged politician.'

'I am entirely converted to that view,' said Nestor; 'and, to be plain, am satisfied that celibacy has been my ruin. I am shelved at sixty-five: why, if I had had a wife the thing could not have been done. She would have harried the universe; for very peace sake men would have relented, and, for a Cabinet Minister, I should

have been scarce out of my teens. It was Chaucer's view—

“A wif? A! Seinte Marie benedicite;
How might a man have any adversité
That hatha wif?”

‘Capital!’ cried Miniver; ‘very good indeed. By Jove! I believe you are destined for the married state after all—*ad multos annos*, my dear friend, *ad multos anno!* But—you must do better than Stanhope—’

‘Ah, poor Stanhope! He has been the laughing-stock of the town,’ said Nestor; ‘a sign-post and a warning to us all. I wonder what has become of his wife?’

‘She has followed Leverson's example, if not his footsteps,’ Miniver replied. ‘Betaken herself to the Continent; and there is no better resource when you

are in a scrape. On the Continent nobody asks questions so long as you can afford to pay your way—men care not whence you have come, or how. But it would be strange if Egidia Stanhope, having lost a husband, and Lever-son a wife, these two should meet after all, and—'

'Become one?' interrupted Nestor.

'Precisely. But Stanhope yet lives—lingers, rather, I might have said; for to all appearance he is not destined for this world much longer. Poor fellow! he has never succeeded in getting over the effects of the trial; and, to speak truly, I am not surprised.'

Lemuel's friends in England were still busy with his career, laying down the programme of a possible future long after

he had himself ceased to think of them. The past was to him henceforth as if it had never been; or rather, it was a dream—a vision—a waste land strewn with dry bones that would never live again. He set his face to the future, to the untried and the unseen; and away to the land of lake and of mountain and wilderness of woods Lemuel turned, still impelled onwards, seeking a new earth and a new sky—a region wherein there was nothing to remind him of that which had been.

‘Let me never see again the things that she looked upon,’ was the thought that was ever uppermost in his mind. ‘Then shall I escape madness, perhaps, and find death.’

To nature, ever fresh and teeming

with interest, Lemuel fled from the presence of man. In her fastnesses he would hide himself away, in the heart of the mighty mountain ranges, where man has not succeeded in scarring nature's fair face with the careworn lines of civilisation: where summer winds yet play in the primeval forest ere, laden with its sweetness, they lightly rest upon the silver lake until its surface is chased all over. Gentle gales whose

‘Odoriferous wings dispense
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
Those balmy spoils.’

There would Lemuel listen for nature's voice, and hang upon her accents. In her was found no guile, no scheme deeply laid to entrap and to entangle, no crafty statesmanship accomplishing its

ends by crooked ways. She is the mother of all the living: whence should the troubled spirit seek rest save at her feet? Enthusiasm guided Lemuel's steps, and it seemed as if nature herself had shared it and risen up to greet him on his way. For, deeper and deeper grew the purple and the gold of her mountains and of her woods, and the glorious sheen of her waters was more dazzling as Lemuel advanced on his journey.

From the depths of the valley into which he had wandered, a mountain lifted its head almost precipitately to the clouds—'a ladder,' as it were, 'standing on the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven.'

On its summit sat the eternal snows, and the glaciers hung heavily over the

unsearchable depths wherein the eye lost itself in gloom and mist. Hear the sharp rattle of the avalanche as it breaks away, shaken from its bed by the thunder, or yielding, it may be, to the gentler influence of the summer solstice. Headlong it plunges into the mighty chasm, and a shower of soft spray cast into mid air alone remains to dazzle for an instant and delight the eye.

At the close of the day Lemuel laid himself to rest upon the side of the mountain, intending, with the first ray of the morning, to seek the summit. He was alone; the novelty of all about him was exciting, and the stillness of this solemn repose of nature above and around him filled his soul with awe. Like giants resting from their labours—

the Titans, the Cyclōpes, he of the hundred hands—the mountains in their snowy garments lay tumbled in endless combinations of light and shadow, while overhead stretched the peaceful heaven, sprinkled with its golden sands—

‘. All on wing,
In motion all, yet what profound repose ;
What fervid action, yet no noise—as aw’d
To silence by the presence of their Lord,
Or hush’d by his command in love to man,
And bid let fall soft beams on human rest—
Restless themselves.’—*Young.*

When Lemuel was again awake the night had scarce passed the middle of its course, and he lay waiting with impatience for the first indications of the day. But the burning lights of the East begin to grow faint as the day-star rises above the horizon, and slowly the shadows lighten, and the snow-clad

peaks stand out more sharply against the sky. Now a crimson streak shoots across the orient, and Lemuel is already to his feet. See, see the morning lights ! It is the dawn !

The red and the purple and the golden heralds spread themselves quickly all over the eastern horizon, proclaiming the approach of the conqueror ; and, the glad tidings passing from height to height, soon the valleys are awake and resound with the milkmaid's song and the timbrel of the woods.

‘Glorious hour!’ Lemuel exclaimed. ‘That I should not have known thee till now ; that, buried in great cities all my life, I should have ignored thy existence ! Who would exchange this Sabbath of the spirit, this silent music

of the morning, even for the applause of the Senate House? How do men, even intellectual men, waste their lives away, and lose in sloth the purest joys that life affords?’

‘Falsely luxurious will not men awake,
And, springing from the bed of sloth, enjoy
The cool, the fragrant and the silent hour
To meditation due and sacred song?
For, is there aught in sleep can charm the wise
To lie in dead oblivion, losing half
The fleeting moments of too brief a life!’

Thomson.

On Lemuel the effect of the scene was electric. He had had until now but an inadequate notion of the glories of the sunrise, none at all of the surpassing splendour of sunrise in the Alps. He was conscious to himself of a new joy; a feeling of exultation entered into his heart that lifted him up, as it were,

out of his former self to a level that was above any that he had reached before. He had come even to acknowledge the possibility of an existence within himself that was higher and nobler than any he had known hitherto. It seemed to him now that there might be, after all, something open to us that was loftier and purer and more worthy than the pursuit of wealth, the attainment of pleasure, or even the ambition of distinction. A life within a life ; a life that might be led, that had, in fact, to be led, if it existed at all, side by side with the life of the animal body, but not dependent upon it ; a life that might continue, even after the body had fallen away ; a life that might be less trammelled and more intellectual without the com-

panionship of the body than with it; a life, in short, whose aims were sublime, and whose destiny was endless. In the rarefied atmosphere of this region, whence from a pinnacle Lemuel looked down upon the world below, here it was that he first admitted to himself the possible existence of a separate intelligence not subject to death.

For weeks together Lemuel wandered in these delightful retreats. The scene was to him as the vision of another world, and his ever-active imagination took in and intensified the splendours which nature had piled here with a lavish hand. The primitive villages, with their simple inhabitants, had nothing in them to distract; these were the guileless children of the mountain

and the forest, and the blight that stains civilisation only too generally had not tainted their simple lives. Lemuel passed through their midst, or rested for a day, it might be, as one in a dream, until he approached the confines of Italy.

Here was presented a novel scene, a new experience as different as possible from that which had preceded it. From the clouds, as it were, from peaks whereon the snows had rested from the creation, Lemuel cast his eyes on the sun-lit plain that stretched away as far as eye might follow, with its winding streams, and glancing lakes, and its cities throned like queens upon their margin. It was a sight to entrance and captivate the eye, and to fill, even to satiety, the imagination. It was a spec-

tacle such as the tempter himself might have chosen for his purpose when he dared to prevail—

‘All these will I give thee if falling down thou wilt adore me.’

O'er many a rugged pass, through many a sunny valley and city, filled with all that can fascinate the eye in form and colour, Lemuel wandered toward the glowing south. But it was not in the works of human ingenuity that he found any charm. He discovered in them no true ideal of beauty ; at the best they were but poor reflections of the great originals that nature only knows how to fashion. It was not in the great cities with their artificial culture that Lemuel experienced relief or pleasure ; he hastened through them, and past them, to the rude hamlet

or the wayside inn, where the children, tutored by nature only, danced and sang and adorned themselves for the village festival with artless pageantry.

See the little maidens with the wild flowers in their hair and the gay kerchief of many hues, and Gian and Luigi are their partners when the day is done. Beneath the trailing vine round and round they twist and turn, and their cries are joyous in the soft air of the evening. And anon the tambourine is touched and held aloft, and the tuneful cymbals make glad music. See the flash from each chesnut eye glancing from beneath its silken shade, and the coquetry of it, whilst the voices of the children are joyous in the soft air of the evening :—

‘Sing we by the greenwood tree,
Merrily, right merrily ;
Sing we when the summer’s flown,
When the autumn’s leaves are brown,
Sing we then right merrily.

Sing we mid the winter’s snows,
Merrily, right merrily ;
Sing we with the bright new year,
When the smiling spring is near,
Sing we then right merrily.

Sing we all the joyous year,
Merrily, right merrily ;
Sing we when the great folks sigh,
When they hold their heads awry,
Sing we then right merrily.’

‘Happy fools!’ Lemuel would exclaim,
as he surveyed their gambols, ‘dancing
on the edge of the precipice, and ye
know it not, ye little wretches! And
yet, may it not be true wisdom after all,’
he would add, ‘to live in your fool’s
paradise, to escape from our sighs and
from the knowledge of our far-seen

catastrophies? What do men gain by their prophetic wisdom? Are their philosophers happier, or so happy, as ye? Where is the king upon his throne, behind which sits black care; the queen amid her maidens that smile even as they worship; the statesman at the council board, that might not exchange with advantage their state and authority for your merry hearts and blithe faces?’

It was at Baïœ that Lemuel found himself in the woods once more, deciphering nature’s secrets, where she alone holds sway. It had not been so always in this place, for here lie the relics of the luxury of a thousand years broken to fragments and tossed in idle heaps. Temples to the fairest of the goddesses who ever claimed Baïœ as pecu-

liarly her own ; villas wherein Lucullus feasted ; baths in which the soft limbs of many a Roman Phryne reposed ; palaces wherein men thought to dwell, but their hands fell away ere yet the capital had found its place or the golden roof was spread ; and still as each perished there was found one to take up the work joyous as the first.

‘ Tu fecunda marmora
Locas sub ipsum funus et sepulcri
Immemor struis domos—’

Now the adder has made there its resting-place, and the owl its retreat.

But Baiœ was not wholly desolate ; for, pendant over its blue waters there hung a villa in the midst of a garden worthy of the Arabian Nights, even of the garden of Ibraheem :—

‘The birds were warbling their various notes upon the branches ; the nightingale was pouring forth its melodious sounds, and the turtle-dove filled the place with its cooing. The blackbird in its singing resembled a human being, and the ring-dove a person exhilarated by wine. The fruits upon the trees, comprising every description that was good to eat, had ripened, and there were two of each kind. There were the camphor-apricot and the almond-apricot, and the apricot of Khurásán ; the plum of a colour like the complexion of beauties ; the cherry, delighting the sense of every man ; the red, the white, and the green fig of the most beautiful colours ; and flowers like pearls and coral. The rose, whose redness put to shame the cheeks of the lovely ; the

violet like sulphur in contact with fire ; the myrtle, the gilliflower, the lavender, and the anemone, and their leaves were bespangled with the tears of the clouds. The chamomile smiled, displaying its teeth, and the narcissus looked at the rose with its negro's eyes ; the citrons resembled round cups ; the limes were like bullets of gold ; the ground was carpeted with flowers of every colour, and the place beamed with the chorus of the spring.'

The moon had risen from her bed in the sea when Lemuel strayed into the grounds of the villa, and the air was heavy with the perfumed breath of the garden. Beyond the murmur of the deep there was no sound save where the nightingale gave forth its liquid notes

‘That close the eye of day.’

Reflected in the placid waters of the bay were the surrounding heights with their groves of cyprus and myrtle, through which the night winds crept and whispered on their way, and in the distance were the long lines of rippling water tipped with silver light.

While Lemuel yet lingered in this delightful spot his attention was arrested by the soft notes of the Zitta, touched with infinite feeling. They proceeded from a bower that overlooked the bay, and presently were accompanied by the sad, sweet notes of a girl’s voice—

‘O Bay of Baicæ softly glancing,
Love sits thronéd by thy shore ;
And lightly on thy bosom dancing
Gleam his eyes for ever more.
Still softly gleaming softly beaming
A lover to his love restore.’

Thy silver wave brings nought but sorrow,
As the weary days pass by,
And there's no comfort in the morrow—
'Tis only made to weep and sigh.
Then take me to my lover gently,
Or let me in thy bosom die.'

The voice had ceased, and there was no longer any sound, for even the nightingale had hushed its note to listen. Lemuel's curiosity was excited, and he drew near to the place whence the voice had come, when there was a sudden splash in the waters beneath, and all was still. Soon, floating on the surface, a body was plainly to be distinguished by the light of the brilliant moon.

In an instant Lemuel had plunged into the sea and, ere many minutes had elapsed, succeeded in attaining his object and conveying to land the now inanimate girl. Laid on the soft bank tenderly,

attired in the white robe of a bride, she rested. To all appearance life had fled, and the pale, placid features might have been mistaken for the cold marble of a Praxiteles or a Myron, such as is unearthed not infrequently from amongst the surrounding ruins. But aid from the villa was quickly at hand, and soon the symptoms of returning animation showed that there was room for hope.

It was midnight, and the little group of anxious watchers yet stood around the sufferer when, in the offing, a sail was observed that flapped gently in the night wind like a sea-bird's wing. Slowly the belated craft made way and approached the shore, and a cry of joy from those in attendance soon announced that the wanderer so long expected, nay,

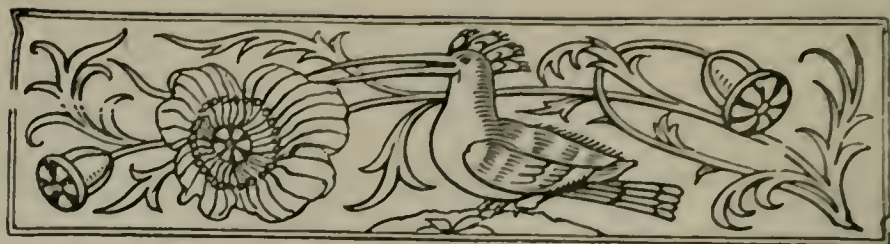
despaired of, was at hand. Dazed and startled by the cry, the bride—for such she was—passes her hand slowly across her forehead; she gazes anxiously into the faces of those who are about her as if half afraid to seek for the reason of their excitement. But her hesitation is at an end, for, raising her gently from the ground, Lemuel has conducted her to her lover's arms.

Lemuel had no mind to witness the transport with which lovers meet when, to all appearance, they have been separated for ever. It was enough to have contributed to their felicity, to have made it possible. For himself he had nothing but reproaches.

‘ Here is love indeed—the love that refuses to outlive the lost one. I have

clung to life, on the contrary, and fled with it like a thief's burden. Why did not I surrender it the day and hour that Muriel died? Why did not I lay it down as do so many for whom it is too heavy to bear? But I have dragged about with me this living death till now; I have feared death, and this frail girl has braved it—thrown herself into its arms. Love that is worthy the name does not hesitate: is it even now too late?'





CHAPTER IX.

‘**T**HERE is one woman in the world whom I have really envied,’ said the Duchess of Shetland, ‘and that with a devouring envy all my life—Kitty Stevens.’

‘Kitty Stevens!’ repeated Bonnie Beauclerc, looking askance.

‘Yes, my dear, it is a name to be loved and honoured: she is known by a higher title to-day. She was the first to sing “Home, Sweet Home” to a public audience. You should have seen the tears in the people’s eyes—you should

have heard the applause. You should have beheld the proud, handsome girl as she kissed her tiny hands in response to the rapturous tumult. That was—is now—my idea of happiness.'

'Oh, I have it!' cried Bonnie, hastening to the open piano, and reproducing a bar or two of the plaintive melody. But, finding that no mark of approval followed, Bonnie turned towards the duchess and saw that she was labouring under deep emotion. Bonnie was quickly at the duchess's side, kissing her tenderly.

'Do not be concerned, my dear,' the duchess sobbed. 'I am an old woman now, and the memories of early and happy days are easily recalled. The voices return—voices that seem to be more familiar as we grow older; to be coming,

as it were, nearer to us, or we to them, perhaps. But there, there—I am better now. Let me hear my favourite once more.'

The fact was, that the duchess's weakness had increased rapidly of late; and those who were about her, Bonnie Beauclerc included, were aware of it. Muriel's early death had struck a fatal blow at the kind old lady's heart; and from that time her strength had declined perceptibly. Bonnie Beauclerc had taken Muriel's place by the duchess's side, though she had never been able to regard Bonnie as a substitute. Bonnie was a cousin of the duchess, and her lively spirits made her a welcome companion at a time when such a one had become a necessity; but there was none of the old love which

had been lavished so fondly and so unreservedly upon Muriel. The duchess was attached to Bonnie Beauclerc, nevertheless; and it was known that she would inherit the greater portion of the duchess's wealth.

And it was sufficient to bring the men to Bonnie's feet in a troop. Hitherto men had been amused with her lively humour and attracted by her wit, but Bonnie was not a girl with whom they fell readily in love. It was the absence of sympathy that men felt, a want of interest on her part in everybody and everything that did not concern herself immediately. There was a reckless gaiety in her manner that seemed to say, I amuse myself at any cost, it is the first consideration: you may find amusement

if you can. She saw the men that she knew best marry one by one, but, somehow, it never occurred to any of them to seek her hand. And Bonnie was offended and mortified by their indifference, and her gaiety became more reckless than before; but the hollow laugh had a ring in it that was not to be misunderstood, and it was bitter even when it was boisterous.

Now, however, the ardent crowd gathers around her, and Bonnie is defiant and smiles cynically when she sees them. Thickly they gather, and their eyes are envious, and they bear ill-will as Bonnie casts a glance upon this one or upon that. For these are the treasure-seekers of society that scour the earth for gold, and finding it are jealous lest

some filibuster of fortune more daring than they should snatch it from their grasp.

And amongst the pretenders to Bonnie Beauclerc's hand Crispeyn Caramel stood well to the front. Crispeyn had arrived at a stage of life when marriage can be looked upon no longer as a freak ; it has to be regarded from the point of view of business apart from any softer feeling. As for sentiment, Crispeyn had not a particle of it in his composition. To skip and to fiddle, to organise a mob of the well-dressed, to manipulate a masquerade, or to caper at the head of a cotillon had comprised very nearly the whole of Crispeyn's aims, and skill in their accomplishment seemed to be his sole qualification for the duties of life.

More than twenty seasons had elapsed since Crispeyn had commenced to fulfil the offices of his calling, and he skipped and fiddled still. But few men are capable of dancing all the way to the grave; the road is liable to become rough and unsuitable towards the end, and our steps to lose their elasticity. Even Crispeyn had begun to acknowledge this, and it occurred to him that, in the society of Bonnie Beauclerc, he might retire from the more arduous duties of the leadership not only with credit but with dignity and splendour.

Bonnie had to be convinced of this, however, and she had, it seemed, other views. For her life had become too enjoyable now; the train that followed and flattered and bent the knee and fawned

was not to be dismissed or exchanged lightly for the society of such a one as Crispeyn Caramel. Moreover, the hero of the ballroom is not invariably the favourite of the boudoir; and if Bonnie gave Crispeyn her hand when he led the cotillon at the dawn, he was often only faintly distinguished among the merry-makers of the afternoon.

But there were other motives that weighed with Bonnie in withdrawing her favour from Crispeyn at this time: she had found a new plaything, a toy that pleased and amused her for its novelty.

Willie Jeffrey was the latest recruit of a regiment of guards. Tall, well-made, and pretty, with fascinating manners, and abounding spirits, he entered at once into Bonnie Beauclerc's circle of intimates, of

which he soon became the most favoured member. Indeed, he was seldom absent now from the gaieties of Shetland House. He arrived with the first and stayed late, and it was apparent that at the hands of the young guardsman Crispeyn ran the risk of incurring a damaging defeat. Indeed, his fears in this respect soon made themselves manifest in the angry glances wherewith the new favourite was regarded. But Crispeyn was not disheartened. He believed in his powers to attract, and he flattered himself still that Bonnie was not insensible to his attentions.

It was the last ball of the season at Shetland House, and Crispeyn determined to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to press his suit. And he permitted himself to hope for success; for

Bonnie had encouraged his pretensions ere now, in the days before she was the heiress of the Duchess of Shetland. He might have married her then for love had he cared, but with the change of circumstances Bonnie also had altered her views.

It was late; the time for the cotillon had arrived, and Bonnie was in the highest spirits. She leaned upon Willie Jeffrey's arm, but she had danced with him already more than once, and Crispeyn was confident that he would be invited as heretofore to lead the cotillon in her company. But Bonnie passed along with her favourite, and Crispeyn could even hear the peal of laughter with which Bonnie, who had noticed his chagrin, now greeted his discomfiture. For him there

was no longer room for self-deception ; he could not conceal from himself that Bonnie had acted advisedly, and that Willie Jeffrey was master of the situation.

‘Do you know,’ Bonnie remarked to her partner as they reposed in an interval of the dance, ‘that I am really indebted to you for having delivered me from the tyranny of that man? He seemed to think that some one had conferred upon him a vested interest in me to the exclusion of everybody else.’

‘Then he fancies that he has been similarly endowed at my expense, I apprehend,’ Willie Jeffrey replied, ‘for I notice that he hardly removes his eyes from me. A man of this kind makes me angry ; but he must be borne with, I suppose,’ Willie added resignedly. ‘At

his time of life we must respect his privilege.'

'His privilege!' exclaimed Bonnie. 'May I ask what you mean by his privilege?'

'Why, the privilege of an old beau,' Willie replied,—'to dictate like a father, and to scold like an aunt. 'Tis the authority that comes with age.'

When the guests thought of retiring it was already the dawn. Crispeyn had abstained from addressing Bonnie Beauclerc during the evening, and he took no part in the cotillon. With the skill of a professor Crispeyn had devised the intricacies of the dance, but it was to Willie Jeffrey that Bonnie assigned the place of honour, and he acquitted himself with creditable sprightliness. It lacked Crispeyn's finished leadership, however,

to make it a success, and he stood apart moody and silent. In his view Bonnie's ridicule was an outrage, and the man who had prompted her was his declared enemy. Crispeyn had made up his mind now, and he was not to be diverted from his purpose and defeated without a struggle, at least by this stripling of the schools. The world had begun to talk, moreover; it was not a secret that Crispeyn had been enticed and led on by Bonnie Beauclerc, and that she had given him cause to expect a favourable issue. When it was observed that she had discarded him, both men and women exchanged significant glances.

As the hour for the departure of the guests drew near, Crispeyn's jealous anger increased in intensity. He beheld the

prospects, upon which he had reckoned, disappear one by one and fall to the ground. Victory was within sight when it was converted into the bitterness of defeat, and the hopes which had resulted from a hundred dalliances were to be set at naught, it seemed, for this frivolous youth. As for Bonnie, she did not say farewell to her partner until the morning lights were already invading the ballroom with their garish lustre; and Crispeyn observed how Willie Jeffrey had held her hand at parting, even pressing it to his lips.

To the balcony Bonnie had betaken herself, whence a view could be had of the young guardsman as he passed into the park, on his way homewards, and Crispeyn Caramel followed her thither.

For the first time in the course of the night he found himself alone in Bonnie's society, and Crispeyn was resolved to seize the opportunity thus afforded to seek an explanation. He was excited and determined.

But Bonnie was in no humour to be catechised ; under the influence of the new attachment she was disposed to resent the persistence of Crispeyn's advances and to speak plainly if need be. At first she parried the questions addressed to her, then briefly remarking that she had no explanation to give, retired abruptly.

Crispeyn was prepared for this result, and, hastening from Shetland House, he followed the route through the park that Willie Jeffrey had taken. Crispeyn's movements had been keenly watched,

however, for Jack loitered still by the doorways of the wealthy, and with the quick observation of those who live by the streets, he had noticed the angry looks with which Crispeyn regarded his rival. Jack had been an unseen witness, moreover, of the interview between Crispeyn and Bonnie Beauclerc on the balcony, and had in his own mind compassed the situation. He suspected that mischief was intended, and followed Crispeyn's footsteps with interest.

The first rays of the sun were just beginning to penetrate the mist that hung over the city, and the park at this hour was still deserted when Crispeyn came up with the young guardsman, who strode heedlessly along. Hurriedly overtaking him, Crispeyn stepped to the front,

and face to face demanded the motives of his action.

Taken thus unawares, Willie Jeffrey made no reply; then, recognising his assailant, endeavoured to pass him by without further notice. But Crispeyn was not to be thus set aside; he repeated his demand with an oath.

The young man's blood was up now; he responded with a word of defiance, and in an instant both were engaged in a desperate encounter.

Finding that the youth and activity of his opponent was telling in his favour, Crispeyn, as a last resort, drew from his breast-pocket a revolver, with which it was his habit to arm himself at night, and had pointed it already at Willie Jeffrey's breast, when a blow from an

unseen hand hurled the weapon into the air.

It was the work of a moment, and the men yet struggled with each other, when there was a flash and a report, and Crispeyn fell in a pool of blood at Willie Jeffrey's feet. Willie was stunned for an instant, overcome by the suddenness of the event ; then, looking up, he beheld Jack standing over Crispeyn Caramel's prostrate form, with the newly-discharged weapon in his hand.





CHAPTER X.

IT was a sultry afternoon ; the wind had dropped since mid-day, and the sail flapped idly by the mast as Lord Beauport's yacht *Falcon* passed with scarce perceptible motion over the gentle swell in the Channel. The yacht was, indeed, all but becalmed, and Bonnie Beauclerc, who had embarked only the day before, was beginning to find time hang heavily on her hands already. She had anticipated a new excitement in life at sea,—a life of continuous adventure and incident : she found a life more mono-

tonous, it seemed to her, than that which she had left behind. But Bonnie was without any settled home now, for the Duchess of Shetland had been dead some weeks, and Bonnie was indisposed, moreover, to encounter the gaze of society whilst it was still engaged in discussing the fate which had overtaken Crispeyn Caramel, and the circumstances that had attended it. Her name had assumed a painful prominence in connection with the tragedy ; and being unable to acquit herself of all blame in the matter, Bonnie had adopted with eagerness her cousin Daphne's suggestion to accompany her and Lord Beauport in a projected voyage round the world.

The first experience of it had not borne out Bonnie's expectations, however, and if this were to be taken as a fair specimen

of what her life was to be for the next two years, it would have been better, Bonnie thought, to remain on shore.

‘May I ask what it is that you are reading?’ inquired Beauport, as he entered the deck cabin of the *Falcon*, where Bonnie lay back in an easy-chair with a book in her hand. ‘I fear that you will find our shelves but poorly provided with the treasures of literature.’

‘It is only a novel,’ Bonnie replied in a weary tone; ‘one of a dozen that arrived on board yesterday from the library.’

‘Then I trust that you have found it entertaining, or, at all events, instructive,’ said his lordship; ‘a novel that cannot boast of either quality is but a sorry companion at the best.’

‘ I cannot say that it is either the one or the other,’ said Bonnie, casting the book from her as she spoke ; ‘ but it will serve to occupy an idle hour. The author is deserving of some credit, however,’ Bonnie added ; ‘ he seems to have accomplished everything except the impossible, and even that he has attempted.’

‘ Indeed ! and pray, what is that ?’

‘ Why, to make his book worth reading,’ Bonnie replied ; ‘ it is a standing difficulty, it appears to me, with authors in these days. Their brains—that is to say, when they have had any—seem to have been drained to the dregs.’

‘ We should make allowances for authors,’ said Beauport ; ‘ it must be admitted, after all, that they labour under serious disadvantages in our time. The

ground is occupied in every part already. There are no regions of thought that have not been traversed even to the uttermost bounds of them, and for effects authors must trust mainly to bad memories. However, there is hope for the novelist; the women are his patrons still; they are tolerant by nature, and are not often difficult to amuse. It is marvellous how slender is the plot that will absorb a woman's mind for the day. Be malicious if you can; but before all things be in love. To achieve a real triumph you should bristle with horrors; murder is indispensable to genuine success, for, in a novel, a woman is as cruel as a tigress, and when blood has commenced to flow you can hardly give her too much of it. Let crime follow upon crimes, abyss call upon abyss, multiply your enormities,

protract your agony, and behold a book that all may read.'

I cannot but agree with much that you have said,' Bonnie replied ; ' but, speaking for myself, I detest your maudlin love scenes ; they make me angry and weary by turns.'

' You prefer the murders and the suicides ?' inquired Beauport.

But Bonnie did not reply. She blushed at the suggestion, and seemed to be disconcerted, and Beauport quickly perceived that he had recalled unwittingly a painful incident in her own career.

' I wish this calm were at an end,' he observed, with a view to change the conversation ; ' we are not making three knots. A gale of wind would be preferable to this.'

‘I should not be surprised if your desire were gratified before the morning, my lord,’ Beauport’s captain remarked, gazing seaward as he spoke. ‘It is freshening already, and the glass is going down with a run.’

‘By Jove! and so it is!’ exclaimed Beauport, now that his attention had been called to the state of the barometer. ‘You will have excitement enough presently, and to spare,’ he added, addressing Bonnie Beauclerc, ‘if this tells truth. ’Tis the glorious uncertainty of the sea. Soon you will be able to lay aside the works of fiction and take a lesson in the vicissitudes of real life.’

‘Delightful!’ Bonnie exclaimed, roused to sudden rapture by the prospect of a storm. ‘I have been longing for a

change. But I can perceive no symptom of it,' Bonnie remarked, shading her eyes and scanning the horizon on every side. 'How wise you men are when the weather is in question! It is strange that women never seem to understand it.'

'Do you hear that?' asked Beauport, placing one hand to his ear as he drew Bonnie's attention to a low whistling sound in the rigging. 'It is the alarm.'

And soon the sail began to fill, and the yacht to heel, and the white tufts here and there made known where the breeze had caught the sea and grazed the surface as it passed. The wild birds that had been resting peacefully on the water or diving sportively beneath it, had taken wing and were flying excitedly round and round and filling the air with

their cries. See them as they turn their white breasts, like huge snowflakes driven before the wind, carried away hither and thither by the gale, until lost to sight in clouds of mist and spray.

And now the night is setting in, and the yacht is labouring heavily, for it is blowing half a gale, and the last glimpse of the land has vanished in the darkness as the yacht stands for the open sea. For two years at the least Beauport proposed to be absent from England. He was leaving home without regret indeed, for most of the pleasures and pastimes that are open to a man of his position had been exhausted already. Each day of his life had become but a repetition of that which preceded it. He had been a prodigal of luxury and a spendthrift of

enjoyment, and now there was no appetite left for the one or occasion for the other. To politics Beauport had turned as to a new experience ; but he was disgusted with his want of success. To him it appeared that there was but one career for which he was fitted, that of a public man, and therein he had failed.

But an expedition that involves so prolonged an absence from home and its associations, which is attended of necessity with risk, is seldom undertaken with a heart that is altogether light. There is a sentiment of misgiving that steals over the mind of the strongest as the coast line grows dim ; a feeling that, after all, it may so easily happen that we shall never revisit the scenes of our youth. It comes upon us for a moment as we gaze wistfully

over the ship's side, when old familiar faces seem to rise up out of the gloom before us — faces that we may never behold again in the flesh. But the sensation does not last,—it is gone now; we have shaken off the foolish thought; and if, perchance, it brought a tear to the eye, it is brushed hurriedly away. For sounds of merry-making are in our ears,—we are ourselves again, and a fig for sentiment! Life is too brief to allow of this loitering by the way, and we are at one with the philosophers of the cockpit, where Jack is spinning a yarn to his mates.

Soon the *Falcon* is bounding over the water with a favouring wind, and Bonnie's languor is passing away under the invigorating influence of the breath

of the ocean. The spirits of all have risen, and Beauport has become quite genial again.

‘I sometimes wish that I had been reconciled to Leverson after all,’ he observed. ‘We may never have the opportunity of meeting again. It is far better to cast ill-will overboard; to let the dead bury their dead—in short, to have an end of it.’

‘What, then, would you have done?’ inquired Daphne sharply.

‘Why, have offered him my hand, and—’

‘Asked him to forgive you?’ interrupted Daphne, with a sneer. ‘I do him the justice to believe that he would have refused.’

‘To forgive me!’ inquired Beauport, in some astonishment.

‘To pardon such an exhibition of self-abasement,’ answered Daphne; ‘to overlook the shame and the degradation of it.’

Beauport was silent; he respected the judgment of his wife. Had he been too generous? Had a moment’s enthusiasm betrayed him into weakness? He believed that it was so, and he was troubled.

‘Even here, in mid-ocean, that man seems to follow and to wound me, and to disturb my peace,’ Beauport exclaimed. ‘He pursues me like an evil spirit that will not be laid, and dogs my path persistently. Daphne is in the right, and I have but displayed once more my folly, the same that shut my eyes to his machinations whilst yet he plotted against me. Yes, Daphne is in the

right. It is to Levenson that I owe my failure in life ; he has stood between me and the achievement of a career that might have been brilliant ; he has sent me away a wanderer over the earth for want of honourable occupation at home. Forgive him ! Why should I forgive him ? Why not curse him rather ? He has been punished, it is true ; but, if it could add anything to his chastisement, I could curse him afresh every day that he lives.'

Beauport had passed from his wife's presence, and was now pacing the open deck. He was vexed with himself, for he felt the force of Daphne's reproof, and it was bitter. Forgiveness practised as a virtue had no meaning for Beauport ; his idea had been to free himself from

the vexation of spirit that abiding vindictiveness carried with it. It was a care and an interruption of the pleasures of life that became wearisome at last, and might for that reason have been abandoned. It needed the persistency of a woman's vengeance to rouse and to sustain the memory of past wrongs, and Daphne was determined that it should not die of inanition if she could prevent it.

When the yacht put in at Vigo, Beauport found letters awaiting him there, and amongst the rest was one from Miniver Green.

‘Time flies,’ so the letter ran, ‘but there are moments, my dear friend, when it would appear to outstrip even the lightning. Verily, it is the multiplication

of events that shortens life, so that when the day is past we can scarce give account of it. Peace is, to my mind, a synonyme for length of days, and years passed in the desert would be double at least yours and mine. Nay, that Methuselah lived in uneventful times may, it seems to me, go far to account for his reputed longevity.

‘A month has not elapsed since you left us, and much has occurred in the interval. Have you heard the strange rumour relating to the wandering Jew—I mean Levenson? It is said that he is at Rome, and that Egidia Stanhope has proceeded thither with a view to marry him. But I am anticipating: I can see you open your eyes in wonderment. Alas! our poor friend Stanhope, is no

more—died of the plague, I may say ; for, surely, there is none more dire and deadly than that of a desperate and defiant wife ? Mercy on us ! If there were a man whose life seemed likely to be tranquil to the close that man was Stanhope. But, as it is, an old judgment has been affirmed, and Solon's aphorism has received a fresh illustration. Let no man be esteemed happy henceforth until the day of his death.'





CHAPTER XI.

A MAN that breaks with the world and avoids it after his career in life has been marked out, and accomplished in part, is disturbed and ill at ease when he encounters the world's gaze once more. A change has come over his life; possibly his vital powers are impaired, and his tendency is towards solitude; he is weary and seeks rest, and the stir of commerce and the feverish race after riches, which characterise great cities, are repulsive to him. It may be sore affliction that has

maimed him, or that he has seen, perchance, the mysterious glimmer, reflected as it were in a glass, of the lights that are above and beyond us, and, beholding another and more tempting goal, takes a sharp turn that is startling to those who look on. It is the spirit that peopled the Egyptian desert of old, and fills the Carthusian cloister at this day.

It was with mixed feelings of apprehension and curiosity, then, that Lemuel found himself in Rome, whither all Italian roads lead. But for him there was a distinction in this case; for Rome stands by itself among the cities of the earth, and is not like to any of them. It is not a capital of pleasure, neither is it of commerce: it is a city set apart wherein

the world and its interests occupy only the second place. The cross that gleams from the summit of St Peter's dominates the city, sets a mark upon it in a manner that no man may mistake: It is a city of the dead, you will say, a monument, if not a sepulchre, of departed greatness. And so it is, and so must it remain for all time. But Rome is more than this; it is the mother as well of a countless multitude of the living.

In Rome Lemuel felt that he was not a stranger altogether, for it is even now the imperial city; it has never lost the instinct of world-wide dominion, and remains, in a sense, the world's capital still. From the ends of the earth men stretch forth their hands to Rome for guidance and counsel, and when Rome

speaks, they bow their heads and defer to its ruling.

And Lemuel claimed kinship with this monarchy of the mind, this empire of the spirit, not based upon material power, but on the sublime allegiance of the intellect; not bounded by the hedgerows and the landmarks of a neighbouring property, such as limit the action and restrict the control of diplomatist or politician, but far-reaching as the universe itself. To Lemuel's mind it presented an object of surpassing interest, a sway more potent, a sovereignty more splendid than ever Cæsar dreamt of.

A mighty throng filled the halls of the Vatican Palace, and there was the enthusiasm of earnest purpose in every face. It was an anxious multitude

gathered from the four winds, and speaking many tongues, but one spirit pervading all, men and women and little children in their mothers' arms, rich and poor, learned and simple, princes and those that served them. Slowly the great doors open, and a procession comes forth, and presently is seen one on whom all eyes are bent. On his right hand stands an Eastern Patriarch arrayed in the robes of a High Priest of the Temple, and on his left is a Western Primate crowned with the helmet that typifies salvation. The hand of the Pope is raised to bless, and the multitude is on its knees. But there is a cry that rises and spreads throughout the vast chamber until it grows into an enthusiastic

shout that re-echoes through a hundred halls,—

‘Tu es Petrus! Tu es Petrus!—Thou art Peter! Thou art Peter!’

It is on every lip; it is repeated in the accents of many lands, and the tears stand in strong men’s eyes. Presently there is a sound more musical than this, and it proceeds from a body of the fair-haired sons of the north. It is the song of the Fatherland in honour of the Pontiff—‘*Stimmt an ein Lied*’—

‘Come let us sing a song to thee,
Great Father of the Christian fold,
O Thou that fillest worthily
The throne that Peter filled of old.
All hail, blest Father! stretch thy hand
To bless the sons of Fatherland!’

With slow and solemn melody the chant rises and falls until the enthusiasm that

will not be repressed breaks forth in renewed acclamations.

In Lemuel's eyes the Pontiff stood even as Aaron in the presence of Israel ; it was the realisation of a picture upon which Lemuel had loved to dwell in the days of his youth :—

‘ In the priestly robe which he wore was the whole world ; and in the four rows of the stones the glory of the Fathers was graven ; and thy Majesty was written upon the diadem of his head.’

Nay, to Lemuel it was even more than this, for Aaron was the High Priest of a nation—here, it seemed, was the High Priest of mankind.

In Rome was to be met a crowd of Lemuel's countrymen, but he was not of their society ; he shunned it rather and

fled from it. He witnessed their rough manners and he recoiled; he observed their insularity and he was ashamed. See them as they ascend the Pincian Hill, blessing heaven the while that they are not as those whom they behold around them. There is even pity in their hearts for this people. A group of monks passes by the way, or, perchance, they are resting in the shade from the mid-day sun. See our self-righteous countrymen how they regard them,—

‘ Those lazy monks ! ’

But are you sure of what you say? You are at the ball or the masquerade, and the monks have retired to rest; but you are not yet out of your first sleep in your beds of down, when the monks have risen already from their pallets of

straw to keep their morning vigil to the Eternal.

‘Those lazy monks—only to think of them! Go up, thou bald-head! Go up, thou bald-head!’

Yes; the word is on your lip, it is in your faces, O salt of the earth! You would not be unjust even here, but to you the case is proved: you have said it and it is enough. But are you sure of what you say? Pass not along lightly, all confident though you be: they who would follow the Hebrew children should take heed of the bears in the wood.

But Lemuel regarded the spectacle from a different aspect.

‘Were there a future,’ he argued, ‘then assuredly would these men be the sages and the provident of the world: there is

none, and they are its dupes and its fools. But they will never know it, and it is well. In the sleep of death the monks will close their eyes and fold their hands in peace, looking for the resurrection of the just and everlasting day.—But there is an end!’

In the midst of his reverie Lemuel wandered into a noble church that from an eminence overlooks the city. The church was empty apparently, but from the inner choir came the voices of the sisterhood to whom it appertained,—

‘Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth! Pleni sunt cœli et terra gloria tua!’

And the roll of the organ accompanied the triumphant song, and the place was filled with its harmony.

‘The heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory!’

Against a pillar Lemuel stood dreamily, and the voices rose and fell, and the burden of the song was still the same,—
‘The heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory!’

It was the thought in Lemuel’s mind for the remainder of the day—he could not get rid of it.

‘Have I alone wandered over the earth and been unable to discover it, this manifestation that fills earth and heaven? or am I alone wise and far-seeing, and all mankind beside fools and imposed upon? Has this earth, this firmament of stars, this infinite variety of life and order, come about through the shaking together of atoms brought into contact by chance and

endless ages, or is there an all-controlling intelligence that from nothing drew the heavens and the earth and saw that they were good? Have I gazed so often upon the lights that He set in the heavens to rule the day and the night, the “greater light and the lesser light,” and marked their courses, and not known His handiwork? Have I dwelt upon the earth that He blessed and bade be fruitful, and seen its returning seasons, faithful echo of the skies, and not learnt to join in the grateful chorus of His creatures? Is mine alone the note of discord, whilst all nature besides sends forth unceasingly the voice of its harmony that rolls as a mighty wave round the foot of His throne to delight the ear even of the Most High? In the thunder have I not known His voice, or recognised in

the morning beam the sheen of His countenance? Is it after all that this life, this world of ours, is a nobler thing than I have taken it to be; nay, that

“This heaven-assumed majestic robe of earth
He deigned to wear who hung the vast expanse
With azure bright, and clothed the sun in gold?”

Have I alone eyes that see not, ears that do not hear?’

Lemuel was disturbed in spirit; he was restless, and wandered heedlessly from place to place amid the fallen greatness of Imperial Rome, pondering over the mystery that envelops our being. Ruin was spread around him on every side, and in the broken shaft he recognised a fitting emblem of his own shattered life. He recalled wistfully in those days Willie Lambton’s warning words:—

‘Who knows but that we shall change places at last, and that when my doubts are ended yours will begin?’

It was in the vicinity of the Forum where the prostrate columns are scattered thickly around, some buried in the earth till but a fragment remains to mark the ruin, whilst others, like the bones of giants, lie bleaching in the sun. Lemuel wandered into a secluded spot, where from amongst the Cyclopean remains of a pagan temple there rose a fair altar to the living God. It was as some vision of hope that brightens our path even at the moment when it is conducting us to the lowest depths of despair; and great as was the desolation on every side, it seemed that bones as dry as these even were not destined to be wholly without life.

At the altar there stood a priest with hands outstretched pleading with Heaven for the people. The worshippers were but a few, and they stood against the columns or knelt upon the marble pavement, gazing upon the act of sacrifice, while a profound stillness pervaded the place. Here was one weighted with years, to whose fading vision the world was growing dim in the near approach of the eternal lights; there another full of life and hope that had laid aside his burden for a space to seek Heaven's blessing on his daily toil. In the aisle was a mother that taught her little one to take its first steps in the house of the Lord, and saw no irreverence in the act.

Presently there is a burst of joyous music, then every head is bowed, and

every knee is bent, and the child is hushed in its mother's bosom. Its heart beats faster now, for it knows that a moment more sacred than the rest has come—He that blessed little children is passing by.

There is a pause of deep silence, even the voice of prayer seems to have been stilled, so profound is it. Lemuel had been standing afar off, and his spirit was weary within him; he would have prayed with the rest had he known how, and from his heart there went up a cry of anguish that pierced the skies.

But what is this change that has come upon him? His troubled spirit that had strayed hither and thither in the darkness till now, seems to emerge of a sudden into the full light of day; the bonds of iron that held him captive appear to dissolve

and melt away of themselves ; the prison bars through which he had been wont to gaze so longingly on the green fields and the smiling gardens wherein others were disporting themselves seem to fall to pieces, and a voice that had been familiar in other days is again in his ears,—

‘ O poor little one, tossed with tempest, without all comfort, behold I will lay thy stones in order, and thy foundations with sapphires.’

In an instant Lemuel has fallen to his knees, his face is buried in his hands, and he weeps like a child.





CHAPTER XII.

‘**S**OME say Leverson has turned missionary, and some mountebank,’ remarked Nestor, who sat in the bow-window of Boodle’s Club in an afternoon of July. ‘The alternative is startling, I admit; but with such a man everything is possible except the common-place. The immortal spark, my dear sir, will continue to shine be the surrounding darkness ever so dense.’

‘Whether Leverson be missionary or mountebank, or neither, or both, it were

idle to conjecture,' said Miniver Green, who kept Nestor company ; 'there is so much of the conjuror in his disposition, that he is at all times prepared to assume as many disguises as Proteus himself, and to electrify the world by the rapidity of the transformation. But Heaven preserve me from these immortal sparks, as you term them ! Their presence is a disturbing element in every company, and interferes with our repose. No ; give me for choice the "large, sound, roundabout sense" with which a man may hope to live in comfort, and to die in peace.'

'To enjoy life a man does not, it is true, stand in need of genius,' said Nestor ; 'indeed, I doubt whether any man of great genius has been a happy man ; it is the men who wait upon genius

that gather its spoils. We need not be uneasy on the subject, however,' Nestor added, 'for genius does not grow in the hedgerows. It is the rarest, as it is the most glittering of gifts, and if genius were essential to success in life, the prosperous men would be few indeed.'

'I am of the same opinion,' Miniver replied; 'but there is another quality which, if less brilliant than genius, is, to my mind, even more effective—I mean tact.'

'But, after all, what is tact?' said Nestor. 'Tact is the genius of good manners. It may not be—it is not—the highest order of genius; it does not come down to us direct from Olympus, I admit; but it is genius still, even though it be not heaven-born.'

'Possibly you are in the right,' Miniver

replied, 'and I will not dispute with you a point which is, I confess, somewhat obscure; but to me tact has ever appeared to occupy a lower level, to be little more, in fact, than good breeding, aided by good luck. I do not ascribe to it any loftier quality. Be that as it may, however, I am convinced that, in the race of life, tact is the safer horse to bet upon. They who possess it are the social kings and queens of society, and their reign is prosperous for the most part. As for what may be the latest phase in Leverson's career, we are not likely to be left long in doubt, for a vigilant scout has gone forth to seek him, one that will search with a lamp.'

'You mean Egidia Stanhope?'

'Precisely. Egidia has made up her

mind. — Heavens! to be pursued by a woman that has made up her mind!’

Miniver held up his hands as he spoke, and shuddered all over.

‘It is a bold policy,’ he added; ‘I may say an audacious policy.’

‘It is usually a successful policy,’ Nestor observed; ‘and that is more to the purpose.’

‘I have had some hairbreadth escapes in my time, it is true,’ continued Miniver, ‘and it was to my heels alone that I owed my preservation. Where I may not strike I cannot parley: I fly precipitately, and at once.’

‘Pardon me, my dear Miniver,’ said Nestor, ‘but to my mind you are vastly too timid in your dealings with the women. I have noticed it frequently,

and, between ourselves, have quaked for your safety ere now. Indeed, to me it is a miracle that they have not made mincemeat of you long since. Display the least disposition to falter, and the women surround you, cut off your retreat and, trumpet-tongued, call for surrender. That you have contrived to steer clear of the women, and to remain a free man, is to me, as I have said, nothing short of a phenomenon.'

'You consider that I am safely in port at last, then?' Miniver inquired.

'Alas! my dear friend,' continued Nestor, with a sigh, 'for you and me the time is well-nigh past when women care to pursue. They have begun to regard us as past redemption, and cautious beyond cure. We need not be despondent, how

ever; it is not an unpleasant stage of existence for those who know. Let us, O my friend, be among the wise ones. Let us cling to our comforts, and chuckle in our chimney-corners, whilst the lights and the shadows of life pass us harmlessly by. Anon we will lift the blind and peep out upon the world from behind it, and behold the by-play, ourselves unseen, and the humours of the show—the politician and the thimblérig, the statesman and the tumbler, the patriot and the pantaloon. They shall parade for our pleasure in holiday attire, while we who are in the secret shall giggle as they pass.'

While speculation was rife among those who were acquainted with Egidia's motives, she pursued her purpose with un-

flinching perseverance. She was not wont to take the despairing views of life that are characteristic, for the most part, of the dyspeptic; she bore down upon the obstacles in her way with a strong will; and, with the habitual vigour of a robust constitution, she saw no difficulties in her path, no limits to her ambition that she could not clear at a bound.

It was evening, and the cool winds descending from the frozen heights above pleasantly relieved the stifling atmosphere of the valleys when the diligence started on its way over the Mont Cenis Pass.

Egidia occupied a place in the coupé; and when the driver cracked his whip, the mules tossed their heads in the air,

and the music of their tinkling bells was grateful to the ear and cheering to the spirits. The views open as the diligence proceeds, and the atmosphere that glowed but now until existence was a torture, is already bracing the nerves. Presently the shades begin to fall around, for the night is at hand, and peak after peak becomes obscure, and the pace is slower and the way more steep. In vain does the driver urge his team to a trot with whip and voice; slowly they labour at their task, and Egidia is weary of her journey already.

There was but one other passenger in the coupé, and of him Egidia had taken but little notice hitherto. From his demeanour and attire, she inferred that he was a priest. He had been engaged in

reading as long as there was light sufficient; now he laid aside his breviary, descended from the clouds, and gazing to the right and the left as well as the remaining light permitted, was evidently endeavouring to ascertain from familiar landmarks how far the diligence had advanced on its way.

‘The road does not seem to improve as we ascend,’ Egidia ventured to remark; ‘I begin to think the journey is not so enjoyable as it promised to be at starting.’

‘It is the experience of every traveller,’ Egidia’s companion replied. ‘I have made this same journey many times, and have ever found that the last stage was the most welcome.’

‘Do you rest at Turin?’ Egidia inquired.

‘I pursue my way without stopping,’ said the priest.

‘The journey before you is a long one,’ observed Egidia; ‘that is if I am right in my conjecture that Rome is your destination.’

‘That is so,’ answered the priest; ‘but I am travelling on duty, not for pleasure, and I may not loiter on the way. Such is the discipline of the society—that of Ignatius—to which I belong. We are perpetually under orders, and there is, I may say, a certain military precision about our movements that we inherit from our founder.’

‘But is it never permissible to use a discretion?’ inquired Egidia.

‘Such only as an officer in the field may exercise when not in command. We

obey those that are set in authority over us even as the soldier does.'

'Surely it is hard,' remarked Egidia, 'very hard to forfeit thus one's liberty, to place one's life at the disposition of another. Have you not found it so?'

'Our experience is otherwise,' replied the priest; 'for the habit of obedience, once acquired, is life-long. To you it may seem strange, but to us it is amusing to hear people lamenting on our behalf the loss of our liberty. The loss cannot be very grievous to those who bear it thus lightly.'

'And your vows, are they irrevocable?'

'Irrevocable.'

'But what if you should repent them?'

'Our vows are not lightly taken,' said the priest, 'and the event you refer to is of the rarest. It is not, indeed, so diffi-

cult as you may at first sight imagine to learn to obey; the vow of obedience is but the complement of two others, those of poverty and abstinence from marriage, and the man who has taken these has but little desire to set up a will of his own. His patrimony has passed into the common fund, he neither possesses nor aspires to possess anything of this world; he has advanced a stage in the journey of life that is ahead of the experience of ordinary men, a stage towards perfection we call it; and such a one has learnt to estimate at its true value what you term a will of his own. He goes whithersoever he is sent—to the missions most likely, to the Pagans it may be—but, go where he will, the place becomes thenceforth his home, and its people his

family. They are to him as father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children. You will smile, perhaps, for it is not easy to realise the fact; but such is the life of the Jesuit; and if you think that it is not a happy life, you are again mistaken. The performance of duty, even though it be rigid, is full of gladness; and it is thus that, unlike the common experience of the world, with us life brightens as it draws to a close. When our shoulders bend at last beneath the weight of years and of labour, then the sun comes forth and the birds begin to sing; for the winter is past, the harvest is ripe, and the golden fruits are already on the trees. We feel like schoolboys released for the holidays—we know that we are going home.'

Egidia parted from the companion of her journey with a certain regret. To her the idea of self-sacrifice was new ; she had not realised until now that it was anything more than a sentiment of the poets, all unsubstantial as the rest, and there was the attractiveness of novelty in it. To her the notion of self-annihilation was an enigma which her imagination refused to follow ; it had no wings wherewith to seek the upper air, or had lost the use of them.

In Rome Egidia promised to renew the acquaintance of her travelling companion, and to visit the church of his order.

‘You will find that it is not one of the least considerable even in the city

of churches,' he observed, as he bade Egidia farewell.

The bells of the church of the Jesu were sounding solemnly, and the great door was festooned, as for a high festival, with crimson cloth and the leaves of the bay. A multitude of men and women, amongst whom were ambassadors and ministers and nobles of every degree, was pouring into the splendid pile, when Egidia, who had arrived in Rome only the day before, mingled with the throng. It was indeed a notable scene. The vast temple had been adorned throughout as if it had been Easter Day, and the costly hangings of crimson and gold almost concealed from view the marbles' past price with which the walls are encrusted. The brilliant sunshine streamed

through each opening, and the countless lights of the chandeliers diffused a soft and mellow glow even in the face of day.

Presently the community is observed advancing in procession from behind the altar: there is animation in every face, and a thrill passes through the assembly as it comes into full view. Men whisper to each other, and women strain their eyes. And now one, whose simple robe of black presents a strange contrast to the splendours around, prostrates himself at the foot of the altar, and there is a moment of silence that is painful from its intensity. But the novice has risen from his knees, and advances towards the assembled community, there humbly to seek admission, as the least among them, to make the irrevocable choice

between the good things of earth and of Heaven.

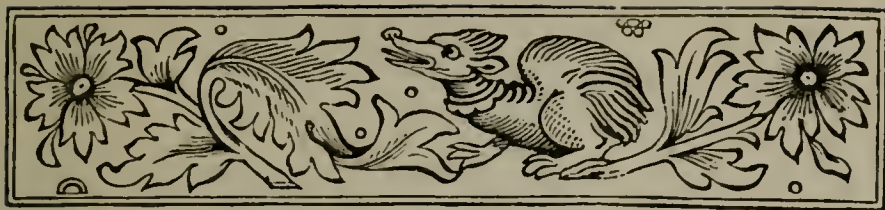
It was at this moment that Egidia entered the church. She had expected to find a bride and a bridegroom happy in the union of their lives ; and her mind was filled with wonder at the scene that was before her. She was at a loss to understand it at first, and she looked in vain for an explanation. But Egidia was not left long in doubt.

Those accents were sufficiently familiar ; there could be no mistaking them, and musical as of old, they rose above the silent multitude. It was Lemuel Leverson that renounced the dreams of earthly ambition thenceforth and for ever.

But in that moment there was at least one word of remonstrance spoken—one

despairing protest was raised to disturb the solemnity of the spectacle ere the sacrifice was complete. Even as the fatal words passed his lips a piercing cry rang through the startled crowd, and Egidia fell fainting into the arms of those around her.





CHAPTER XIII.

IT was a solitary sea in the remote East upon which the *Falcon* lay becalmed. For weeks together no sail had been seen in this desert of the deep, whereon the blazing sun poured forth intolerable day, while in the glassy surface of the undulating water the sun's image was reflected back with a glory that rivalled its own.

Beneath a shady canopy on the deck Daphne lay, seeking in vain to find refuge in sleep from the workings of her weary brain ; weary with the haunting

thought of a disappointed ambition that pursued her in these days of enforced idleness with relentless monotony, weary almost of an existence that had ceased to excite. It was in truth one of the resting places of life, forced upon us it may be, yet all too brief at the best, wherein the wise are wont to make up their accounts for the past and to resolve for the future. Life is too short and too changeable to stand still very long, and we may well accept with patience, if not with thanksgiving, the breathing spaces that are thus afforded us. But Daphne chafed under her lot; and to her it seemed as if the mysterious veil that hangs before destiny had been lifted, or had nothing left to conceal; that the secret charm of life—its possibilities—had been

taken away, and that there remained only the dead level of an uneventful future, in which hope, the mainspring of enterprise, had ceased to have any part.

Fools that we are to seek to pry into futurity! What would our lives be worth were our efforts to be crowned with even a measure of success? The uncertainty of what is to come it is that saves our throats. Did we but know the dreariness, or worse, of the way that lies before so many of us, there are not a few who would refuse to continue the journey. Happy ignorance! It is the talisman that makes life tolerable, and is better than all the wisdom of the Cabala. Happy ignorance! that leaves hope yet lingering in our hearts, even when the

fates and the furies have done their worst with them.

But even now the signal for action has been given, and the ripple is upon the water ; the soft airs are whispering already in the sail, and a cloud not bigger than a man's hand is on the horizon. See ! the ship is bending to the gale, her yards already touch the main.

Awake ! ye men of iron that are wont to do battle with the deep ; to your posts every one ! Reef the sail ere it be torn to shreds, and scud before the storm. But it is upon you ere you are aware, and it is the terrible typhoon of the China seas. The mainmast has gone already by the board. Cut it away. And now you are yourselves adrift. The winds whistle and shriek through the

canvas and the riggings that remain, and the *Falcon* is the toy of the tempest. The reefs are at hand : it is the inhospitable Corean shore, and brave men shudder at the prospect. The sky is turned to blackness, and from out its troubled bosom the winds leap and bellow and hurl themselves upon the earth to devastate and destroy.

Human effort is idle ; helplessly the vessel reels and staggers beneath the blows of heaven, until, amid the roar of the raging waters, it is cast broadside upon the rocks and the shoals. Who shall tell the feelings that harrow even stout hearts at such a moment as this, in which heaven seems to shut its eyes and its ears to human travail, and to leave the world for a space to lapse into

chaos? The demon is on the wings of the wind—he has it his own way now—and with blind fury directs the elements to man's destruction. The troubled waters cry out with a mighty voice, and the roaring of the waves reaches the clouds; but heaven will not hear. For the day and the hour the demon reigns ere comes the great calm of the covenant, lest all things 'wherein there is the breath of life' should perish from the earth.

Slowly the waters subside and the winds are hushed, and the torn and shattered clouds melt away one by one and dissolve apace, and the stars look out from the firmament as the balmy night sets in, and the gleam of them is upon the face of the waters. But where is the good ship and where her valiant

crew? She is nowhere to be met with, search we the horizon to its uttermost bounds. From its mysterious depths the ocean cried for a victim and has been satiated, and there is not a plank, not a shred to tell the tale of the ruin that in an hour was wrought. Stay, there is still a relic to be found where the pale moonbeam sheds its melancholy lustre, like a torch by the bier of the departed. Borne on the surface of the rippling water is a girl's fair form, her long tresses mingling with the wave, and by her side lies one older than she, yet scarce less fair. Softer than the down is their pillow, but on the pale forehead there rests the marble of death. They are gently laid, though no loving hand of father or mother or husband is there to twine the wreath,

and snatch from the hand of the destroyer some part of his victory.

And Beauport, what of him? Is he, too, at peace, passed beyond the anguish of such a spectacle? Cast upon the wild Korean shore, bruised and bleeding, he gazes around, even as one that has risen in his sleep when phantoms float upon the brain, then, waking, stares madly about him, seeking the midnight terror. Beauport raises his hands to heaven, not to invoke its pity indeed—he knows nothing of that—it is but to curse the day that gave him birth, ere reeling, he falls to the ground and lies in the dust. He is content to die, he is more than content, he longs for death and welcome oblivion. Intoxicating draught! All-saving drug! Too potent to wear out;

from which there is no weary reawakening to this world of sorrow !

But Beauport has not done with life. There is a savage cry and the sound of many feet, and the human hyænas are upon him. Woe to the stranger that is caught in this inhospitable land ! For him no torture is too refined, no suffering too exquisite. He is a Holocaust, an offering acceptable on the blood-stained altars of the Moloch of this land—the Ashtarothe, the Baal-Berith, the Rimmon—and the groans of the tortured are held glad music in their ears.

The multitude gathers round, and there is exultation in every face, and their cries are shrill, as the scarce breathing wretch is dragged into the presence of the grim Deity, at whose feet the act of immola-

tion is to be performed. In the shade of dark woods, where a cavern opens its yawning mouth like the gate of hell, is a veritable Golgotha. The bones of a multitude of victims lie scattered around, whilst the feet of the image are splashed with their life's blood.

The uproar is at its height, the hideous rites have already begun, when there is a whispering amongst the throng and a fear comes upon them of a sudden, for it is reported that the man of the black robe is approaching, he and his faithful band. He is clad in the simple garb of the Jesuit mission, and he is armed with the crucifix alone, but the crowd gives place at sight of him, for there is a power in his aspect that they dare not withstand. There is a dread in men's hearts as they

look upon him, they know not why, and his presence cowers them. He has forbidden the human sacrifices ere now, and has smitten the idols, and Moloch has fallen on his face, and the hands that worked iniquity are broken to fragments. Nay, it is said strange voices have been heard in the depths of the sacred groves, the

‘Matted woods where birds forget to sing ;’

weird voices of anger and of lamentation in these latter days—

‘What have I to do with thee? Why troublest thou me?’

Voices that had been heard on the earth before ; voices that had mingled, it may be, in the cry of the hoarse crowd of Jerusalem,—

‘Away with Him ! away with Him !’

But the multitude has fallen back, and the priest remains alone by the side of the dying man. His eyes are fixed upon the crucifix, and there is a light in them now such as had not shone there since the days of his childhood. With a last effort he stretches forth his hands to the symbol of redemption, and his lips are seen to move:—

‘O Christ! Thou hast conquered, and Thine is the kingdom and the glory,—for ever and ever!’

Our story is ended; there is but a word to add, and it was spoken by Lemuel Leverson at Lord Beauport’s death-bed.

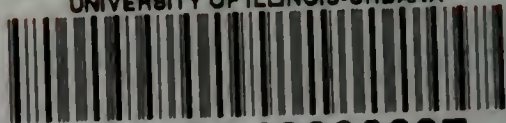
Every head is bowed; no sound breaks in upon the silence of that hour save the distant beat of the silver sea; the priest

alone stands erect, holding aloft the crucifix in the sight of the dying man. But his eyes are waxing dim, a convulsive shudder shakes his frame, the crucifix is pressed to his lips. It is the voice of Lemuel Leverson that is heard now:—

‘Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the name of Him that created thee; in the name of Him that redeemed thee; in the name of Him that sanctified thee. Come to his assistance, ye Hosts of Heaven—hasten to his aid, ye angels of the Lord!’

THE END.

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